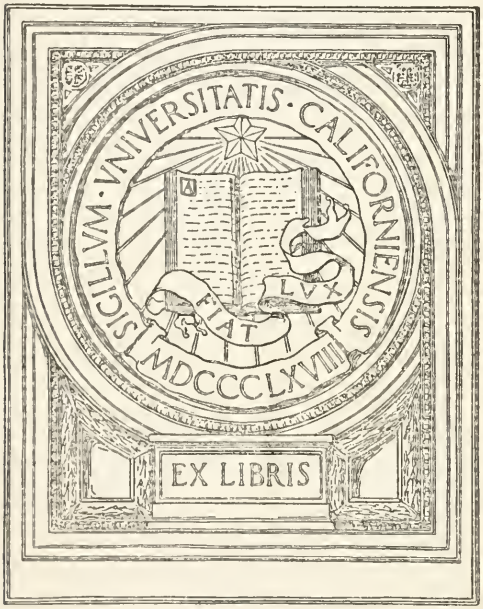

3 vol.

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A CHARMING FELLOW.

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BY

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ETC. ETC.

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A CHARMING FELLOW.

CHAPTER I.

"To be frank with you, Mr. Diamond, I don't believe Dr. Bodkin understands my son's genius."

"I beg your pardon, madam, you said your son's——?"

"Genius, sir; the bent of his genius. Algy's is not a mechanical mind."

Mrs. Errington slightly tossed her head as she uttered the word "mechanical."

Mr. Diamond said "Oh!" and then sat silent.

The room was very quiet. The autumn day was fading, and the mingling of twilight and firelight, and the stillness of the scene, were conducive to mute meditation. It was a long, low room, with an uneven floor, a whitewashed ceiling crossed by heavy beams, and one large bow window. It was furnished with the spindle-legged chairs and tables

in use in the last century. A crimson drugget covered the floor, and in front of the hearth lay a rug, made of scraps of black and coloured cloth, neatly sewn together in a pattern. Over the high wooden mantelpiece hung, on one side, a faded water-colour sketch of a gentleman, with powdered hair; and on the other, an oval miniature of much later date, which represented a fair, florid young lady, with large languid blue eyes, and a red mouth, somewhat too full-lipped. Notwithstanding the years which had elapsed since the miniature was painted, it was still sufficiently like Mrs. Errington to be recognised for her portrait. There was an old harpsichord in the room, and a few books on hanging shelves. But the only handsome or costly object to be seen were some delicate blue and white china cups and saucers, which glistened from an oaken corner-cupboard; and a large work-box of tortoise-shell, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, lined with amber satin, and fitted with all the implements of needlework, in richly-chased silver. The box, like the china cupboard, stood wide open to display its contents, and was evidently a subject of pride to its possessor. It was entirely incongruous with the rest of the furniture, which, although decent and serviceable, was very plain, and rather scanty.

Nevertheless the room looked snug and home-like. The coal-fire burnt with a deep glowing light; a small copper kettle was singing cheerily

on the hob; tea-things were laid on a table in front of the fire; and a fitful, moaning wind, that rattled now and then against the antique casement, enhanced the comfort of the scene by its suggestion of forlorn chilliness without.

But however the influences of the time and place might incline Mr. Diamond to silence, they had no such effect on Mrs. Errington.

After a short pause, during which she seemed to be awaiting some remark from her companion, she observed once more, "No; I do not think the doctor understands Algy's genius. And that is why I was anxious to ask your advice, on this proposition of Mr. Filthorpe's."

"But, madam, why should you suppose me likely to understand Algernon better than Dr. Bodkin does?"

"Oh, because—— In the first place, you are younger, nearer Algy's own age."

"Ah! There is a wide gap, though, between his eighteen and my eight-and-twenty—a wider gap than the mere ten years would necessarily make in all cases."

Mrs. Errington glanced at the speaker, and thought, in the maternal pride of her heart, that there was indeed a wide difference between her joyous, handsome Algernon, and Matthew Diamond, second master at the Whitford Grammar School; and she thought, too, that the difference was all to

her son's advantage. Mr. Diamond was a grave-looking young man, with a spare, strong figure, and a face which, in repose, was neither handsome nor ugly. His clean-shaven chin and upper lip were firmly cut, and he had a pair of keen grey eyes. But such as it was, it was a face which most persons who saw it often, fell into a habit of watching. It raised an indefinite expectation. You were instinctively aware of something latent beneath its habitual expression of seriousness and reserve. What the "something" might be, was variously guessed at according to the temperament of the observer.

"Then there is another reason why I wished to consult you," pursued Mrs. Errington. "I have a great opinion of your judgment, from what Algy tells me. I assure you Algy thinks an immense deal of your talents, Mr. Diamond. You must not think I flatter you."

"No," replied Mr. Diamond, very quietly, "I do not think you flatter me."

"And therefore I have told you the state of the case quite openly. And I would not have you hesitate to give your advice, from any fear of disagreeing with my opinion."

Mr. Diamond leaned his elbow on the table, and his face on his hand, which he held so as to hide his mouth—an habitual posture with him—and looked gravely at Mrs. Errington.

"I trust," continued the lady, "that I am superior to the weakness of requiring blind acquiescence from people."

Mrs. Errington spoke in a mellow, measured voice, and had a soft smiling cast of countenance. Both these were frequently contradicted in a startling manner by the words she uttered: for, in truth, the worthy lady's soul and body were no more like each other than a peach-stone is like a peach. Her velvety softness was not affected, but it was merely external, and the real woman was nothing less than tender. Sensitive persons did not fare very well with Mrs. Errington; who, withal, had the reputation of being an exceedingly good-natured woman.

"If you think my advice worth having——" said Mr. Diamond.

"I do really. Now pray don't be shy of speaking out!" interrupted the lady, reassuringly.

"I must tell you that I think your cousin's offer is much too good to be refused, and opens a prospect which many young men would envy."

"You advise us to accept it?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, Mr. Diamond, I don't believe you understand Algy one bit better than the doctor does!" exclaimed Mrs. Errington, leaning back in her chair, and folding her large white hands together in a resigned manner.

"I warned you, you know, that I might not," answered Mr. Diamond, composedly.

"'A prospect which many young men would envy!' Well, perhaps 'many young men,' yes; I daresay. But for Algy! Do but think of it, Mr. Diamond; to sit all day on a high stool in a musty office! You must own that, for a young fellow of my son's spirit, the idea is not alluring."

"Oh, if the question be merely for Algernon to choose some method of passing his time which shall be alluring——"

Mrs. Errington drew herself up a little. "No;" said she, "that is certainly not the question, Mr. Diamond. At the same time, before embracing Mr. Filthorpe's offer, I thought it only reasonable to ask myself, 'May we not do better? Can we not do better?'"

"I begin to perceive," thought Matthew Diamond within himself, "that Mrs. Errington's meaning, when she asks 'advice,' is pretty much like that of most of her neighbours. Having already made up her mind how to act, she would like to be told that her decision is the best and wisest conceivable." He said nothing, however, but bowed his head a little, to show that he was giving attention to the lady's discourse.

"We have an alternative, you must know," said Mrs. Errington, turning her eyes languidly on Mr. Diamond, but not moving her head from its

comfortable resting-place against the back of her well-cushioned arm-chair. "We are not bound hand and foot to this Bristol merchant. By the way, you spoke of him as my cousin——"

"I beg your pardon; is he not so?"

"No; not mine. My poor husband's," with a glance at the portrait over the mantelpiece. "None of my family ever had the remotest connection with commerce."

"Ha! The good fortune was all on the side of the Erringtons?"

This time Mrs. Errington turned her head, so as to look full at her interlocutor. There met her view the same calm forehead, the same steady eyes, the same sheltering hand gently stroking the upper lip, which she had looked upon a minute before.

"My good sir!" she answered, in a tone of patient explanation, "my own family, the Ancrams, were people of the very first quality in Warwickshire. My grandfather never stirred out without his coach and four!"

"Ah!"

"Oh, yes, Algy's prospects in life ought to be very, very different from what they are. Of course he ought to go to the university; but I cannot afford to send him there. I make no secret of my circumstances. College is out of the question for him, poor boy, unless he entered himself as a what-do-you-call-it? A sort of pauper, a sizar. And

I suppose you would hardly advise him to do that!"

"No; I should by no means advise it. I was a sizar myself."

"Really? Ah well, then you know what it is. And I am quite sure it would never suit Algy's spirits."

"I am quite sure it would not."

Mrs. Errington's good opinion of the tutor's judgment, which had been considerably shaken, began to revive.

"I see you know something of his character," said she, smiling. "Well, then, the case stands thus; Algy is turned eighteen; he has had the best education I could give him—indeed, my chief motive for settling in this obscure little hole, when I was left a widow, was the fact that Dr. Bodkin, who was an old acquaintance of my husband, was head of the Grammar School here, and I knew I could give my boy the education of a gentleman—up to a certain point—at small expense. He has had this offer from the Bristol man, and he has had another offer of a very different sort from my side of the house."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, yes; perhaps if I had began by stating that circumstance, you might have modified your advice, eh, Mr. Diamond?" This was said in a tone of mild raillery.

"Why," answered Mr. Diamond, slowly, "I must own that my advice usually does depend somewhat on my knowledge of the circumstances of the case under consideration."

"Now, that's candid—and I love candour, as I told you. The fact is, Lord Seely married an Ancram."

There was a pause. Mrs. Errington looked inquiringly at her companion. "You have heard of Lord Seely?" she said.

"I have seen his name in the newspapers, in the days when I used to read newspapers."

"He is a most distinguished nobleman."

Another pause.

"Well," continued Mrs. Errington, condescendingly, "I cannot expect all that to interest you, Mr. Diamond. Perhaps there may be a little family partiality, in my estimate of Lord Seely. However, be that as it may, he married an Ancram. She was of the younger branch, my father's second cousin. When Algy first began to turn his thoughts towards a diplomatic career——"

"Eh?"

"A diplomatic——Oh, didn't you know? Yes; he has had serious thoughts of it for some time."

"Algernon?"

"Certainly! And, in confidence, Mr. Diamond, I think it would suit him admirably. I fancy it is what his genius is best adapted for. Well, when

I perceived this bent in him, I made—indirectly—application to Lady Seely, and she returned—also indirectly—a most gracious answer. She should be happy to receive Mr. Algernon Ancram Errington, whenever she was in town."

"Is that all?"

"All?"

"All that you have to tell me, to modify—and so on?"

"That would lead to more, don't you see? Lord Seely has enormous influence, and I don't know anyone better able to push the fortunes of a young man like Algy."

"But has he promised anything definite?"

"He could hardly do that, seeing that, as yet, he knows nothing of my son whatever! My dear Mr. Diamond, when you know as much of the world as I do, you will see that it does not do to rush at things in a hurry. You must give people time. Especially a man like Lord Seely, who of course cannot be expected to—to——"

"Do you mean that you seriously contemplate dropping the substance of Filthorpe, for this shadow of Seely?"

"Mr. Diamond! What very extraordinary expressions!"

Mr. Diamond took his hand from his mouth, clasped both hands on his knee, and sat looking into the fire as abstractedly as if there had

been no other person within sight or sound of him.

Mrs. Errington, apparently taking it for granted that his attitude was one of profound attention to herself, proceeded flowingly to justify her decision, for it evidently was a decision—to decline the Bristol merchant's offer of employment and a home for her son. Besides Algy's "genius," there were other objections. Mr. Filthorpe had a vulgar wife and a vulgar daughter. Of course they must be vulgar. That was clear. And who could say that they might not endeavour to entangle Algy in some promise, or engagement, to marry the daughter? Nay, it was very certain that they would make such an endeavour. Possibly —probably—that was old Filthorpe's real object in inviting his young relative to accept a place in his counting-house. Indeed, they might confidently consider that it was so. Of course Algy would be a bait to these people! And as to Lord Seely, Mr. Diamond did not know (how should he? seeing that he had been little more than a twelvemonth in Whitford, and out of that time had scarcely ever had an hour's converse with her) that she, Mrs. Errington, was a person rather apt to hide and diminish, than unduly blazon forth her family glories. And she was, moreover, scrupulous to a fault in the accuracy of all her statements. Nevertheless, she must say that there was, perhaps, no

nobleman in England whose patronage would have more weight than his lordship's; and whether or not the brilliancy of Algy's parts, and the charm of his manners, would be likely to captivate a man of Lord Seely's taste and cultivation; that she left to the sense and candour of any one who knew, and could appreciate her son.

Mr. Diamond uttered an odd, smothered kind of sound.

"Eh?" said Mrs. Errington, mellifluously.

There was no answer.

"Hulloa!" cried a blithe voice, as the door was suddenly thrown open. "Why, you're all in the dark here!"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Diamond, jumping to his feet, and then sitting down again, "I believe —I'm afraid I was almost asleep!"

CHAPTER II.

Algernon Errington came gaily into the dim room bringing with him a gust of fresh, cold air. His first act was to stir the fire, which sent up a flickering blaze. The light played upon the tea-table and the two persons who sat at it; and also, of course, illuminated the new comer's face and form, which were such as to justify much of his mother's pride in his appearance. He was of middle height, with a singularly elegant figure, and finely-shaped hands and feet. His smooth, blooming face was, perhaps, somewhat too girlish-looking, but there was nothing effeminate in his bearing. All his movements were springy nnd elastic. His blue eyes—less large, but more bright than his mother's—were full of vivacity, and a smile of mischievous merriment played round his mouth.

"Mr. Diamond!" he exclaimed, as soon as he perceived who was the other occupant of the room besides his mother.

"You're late," said the tutor, pulling from his waistcoat-pocket a large silver watch, and examining the clumsy black figures on its face by the firelight.

"Why," said Algernon, "I had no idea you were here! I thought my mother had sent word to ask you to put off our reading this evening. You promised to write a note, mother. Didn't you send it?"

It appeared that Mrs. Errington had not sent a note, had not even written one, had forgotten all about it. Her mind was so full of other things! And then when Mr. Diamond appeared, she did not explain at once that Algernon would probably not come home in time for his lesson, because she wanted to have a little conversation with Mr. Diamond. And they began to talk, and the time slipped away: besides, she knew that Mr. Diamond had nothing to do of an evening, so it was not of much consequence, was it?

Algernon winced at this speech, and cast a quick, furtive look at his tutor, who, however, might have been deaf, for any sign he gave of having heard it. He rose from his chair, and addressing Mrs. Errington, declared with his usual brevity that, as no work was to be done, he must forthwith wish her "Good evening."

"Now, no nonsense!" said Mrs. Errington. "You'll do nothing of the kind! Stay and have a cup of tea with us for once in a way."

"Thank you, no; I never—it is not my habit——"

"Not your habit to be sociable! I know that; and it is a great pity. What would you be doing at home? Only poring over books until you got a headache! A little cheerful society would do you all the good in the world. You were all but dropping asleep just now: and no wonder! I'm sure, after teaching all day in a close school, full of boys buzzing like so many blue-bottles, one would feel as stupid as an owl oneself!"

"Perhaps I am peculiarly susceptible to stupefying influences," said Mr. Diamond, with a rueful shake of the head. And, as he spoke, there played round his mouth the faint flicker of a smile.

"Now put your hat down, and take your seat!" cried Mrs. Errington, authoritatively.

"I am very sorry to seem ungrateful, but——"

"I had asked little Rhoda to come up after tea and keep me company, thinking I should be alone. But you won't mind Rhoda. She knows her place."

Mr. Diamond paused in the act of buttoning his coat across his breast. "You are very kind," he murmured.

"There, sit down, and I will undertake to give you a cup of excellent tea. I hope you know good tea when you get it? There are some people who couldn't tell my fine Pekoe from sloe-leaves. Algy, bring me the kettle."

And Mrs. Errington betook herself to the business of making tea. To her it seemed perfectly natural—almost a matter of course—that Matthew Diamond should stay, since she was kind enough to press it. But Algernon, who knew his tutor better, could not refrain from expressing a little surprise at his yielding.

"Why, mother," said he, as he poured the boiling water into the tea-pot, "you may consider yourself singled out for high distinction. Mr. Diamond has consented at your request to stay after having said he would go! I don't believe there's another lady in Whitford who has been so honoured."

If Algernon had not been peering through the clouds of steam, to ascertain whether the tea-pot were full or not, he would have perceived an unwonted flush mount in Matthew Diamond's face up to the roots of his hair, and then slowly fade away.

"And how did you find the doctor and all of them?" asked Mrs. Errington of her son, when they were all seated at the tea-table.

"Oh, the doctor's all right. He only came in for a few minutes after morning school."

"What did he say to you, Algy?"

"Oh, I don't know: something about not altogether neglecting my studies now I had left school, whatever path in life I chose. He always says that

sort of thing, you know," answered Algernon carelessly.

"And Mrs. Bodkin?"

"Oh, she's all right, too."

"And Minnie?"

"Oh, she's all—no; she was not quite so well as usual, I think. Mrs. Bodkin said she had had a bad attack of pain in the night. But Minnie didn't mention it. She never likes to be condoled with and pitied, you know. So of course I didn't say anything. It's so unpleasant to have to keep noticing people's health!"

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Errington. "What a misfortune for that girl to be a helpless invalid for the rest of her life!"

"Is her disorder incurable?" asked Mr. Diamond.

"Oh, quite, I believe. Spine, you know. An accident. And they say that when a child she was such an active creature."

"Her brain is active enough now," observed Mr. Diamond musingly, with his eyes fixed on the fire. "I don't know a keener, quicker intellect."

"What, Minnie Bodkin?" exclaimed Algernon, pausing in the demolition of a stout pile of sliced bread and butter. "I should think so! She's as clever as a man! I mean," he added, reading and answering his tutor's satirically-raised eyebrows, as rapidly as though he were replying to an arti-

culate observation, "I mean—of course I know she's a deuced deal cleverer than lots of men. But I mean that Minnie Bodkin is clever after a manly fashion. Not a bit Missish. By Jove! I wish I knew as much Greek as she does!"

"I do not at all approve of blue-stockings in general," said Mrs. Errington; "but in her case, poor thing, one must make allowances."

"I think she's pretty," announced Algernon, condescendingly.

"She would be if she didn't look so sickly. No complexion," said Mrs. Errington, intently observing her own florid face, unnaturally elongated, in the bowl of a spoon.

"Don't you think her pretty, sir?" asked Algernon, turning to Mr. Diamond.

"A great deal more than pretty."

"You don't go there very often, I think?" said Mrs. Errington interrogatively.

"No, madam."

"Well, now, you really ought. I know you would be welcome. The doctor has more than once told me so. And Mrs. Bodkin is so very affable! I'm sure you need not hesitate about going there."

Algernon jumped up to replenish the tea-pot, with an unnecessary amount of bustle, and began to rattle out a volley of lively nonsense, with the view of diverting his mother's attention from the subject

of Mr. Diamond's neglect of the Bodkin family. He dreaded some rejoinder on the part of the tutor which should offend his mother beyond forgiveness. He had had experience of some of Matthew Diamond's blunt speeches, of which Dr. Bodkin himself was supposed to be in some awe. It was clearly no business of Mrs. Errington's where Mr. Diamond chose to bestow his visits; neither could she in any degree be aware what reasons he might have for his conduct. "And the worst of it is, he's quite capable of telling my mother so, if she goes too far," reflected Algernon. So he chatted and laughed, as if from overflowing good spirits, until the peril was past. This young gentleman was so quick and flexible, and had so buoyant a temperament, that he was reputed more careless and thoughtless than was altogether the case. His mind moved rapidly, and he had an instinctive habit of uttering the result of its calculations, in the most impulsive way imaginable. You could not tell, by observing Algernon's manner, whether he were giving you his first thought or his second.

When the meal was over, Mrs. Errington rang to have the table cleared. A little prim servant-maid, in a coarse, clean apron and bib, appeared at the sound of the bell, and began to gather the tea-things together. Algernon sat down at the old harpsichord, and, after playing a few chords, commenced singing softly in a pleasant tenor voice

some fragments of sentimental ballads in vogue at that day. (Does the reader ask, "and when was 'that day?'" He must content himself with the information that it was within a year or two of the year 1830.) Mr. Diamond walked to the window, and holding aside the blind, stood looking out at the dark sky.

All at once, when the servant opened the door to go out, there came up from the lower part of the house the sound of singing; slow, long-drawn, rather tuneless singing of a few voices, male and female.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Errington, "Oh dear me, Sarah, how is this?"

Algernon made a comical face of disgust, and put his hands to his ears.

"It be as Mr. Powell's ha' come back, mum," said Sarah, with much gravity.

"Really! Really!" said Mrs. Errington, in the tone of one protesting against an utterly unjustifiable offence.

"Come back! Where has he been?" asked Algernon, carelessly.

"On 'is rounds, please, sir."

"I do wish Mr. Powell would choose some other time for his performances!" cried Mrs. Errington, when the servant had left the room. "Now Thursday—on Thursday, for instance, we are going to a whist party, at the Bodkins', and then he might

squall out his psalms, and shout, and rave, without annoying anybody."

"He'd only annoy the neighbours," said Algernon, "and that wouldn't matter!"

He was smiling with a sort of contemptuous amusement, and touching random notes here and there on the harpsichord with one finger.

"There will be no getting Rhoda upstairs to-night," said Mrs. Errington. "Poor little thing! she's in for a whole evening of psalm-singing."

Algernon rose from the instrument with a clouded brow. His face wore the petulant look of a spoiled child, whose will has been unexpectedly crossed.

"Deuce take Mr. Powell, and all Welsh Methodists like him!" said he.

"My dear Algy! No, no; I cannot approve of that, though Mr. Powell is a Dissenter. Besides, such language in my presence is not respectful."

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said Algernon, laughing. And with the laughter, the cloud cleared from his brow. Clouds never rested there long.

"Will you have a game of cribbage with me, Mr. Diamond? This naughty boy will scarcely ever play with me. Or, if you prefer it, dummy whist——?"

"No whist for me," interposed Algernon, decisively. "It is such a botheration. And I play

so atrociously that it would be cruel to ask Mr. Diamond to sit down with me."

With that he returned to the harpsichord, and began singing softly to himself in snatches.

"Cribbage then?" said Mrs. Errington in her mellow, measured tones.

Mr. Diamond let fall the blind from his hand so roughly that the wooden roller rattled against the wainscot, and advanced to the table where Mrs. Errington was already setting forth the cards and cribbage-board. He sat down without a word, cut the cards as she directed, shuffled, dealt, and played in a moody sort of silent manner; which, however, did not affect Mrs. Errington's nerves at all.

Meanwhile, there went on beneath Algernon's love-songs and the few utterances of the players which the game necessitated, a kind of accompanying "bourdon" of voices from downstairs. Sometimes one single voice would rise in passionate tones, almost as if in wrath. Then came singing again, which, softened by distance, had a wild, wailing character of ineffable melancholy. Algernon paused in his fitful playing and singing, as though unwilling to be in dissonance with those long-drawn sounds. Mrs. Errington calmly continued to exclaim, "Fifteen six," and "two for his heels," without regard to anything but her game.

When the rubber was at an end, Mr. Diamond rose to take his leave.

He lingered a little in doing so. He lingered in taking up his hat, and in buttoning his coat across his breast.

"Have you not anything warmer to put on?" said Mrs. Errington. "Dear me, it is very wrong to go out of this snug room into the air—and the wind has got up, too!—with no more wrap than you have been sitting in, here by the fire! Algy, lend him your great-coat."

"Thank you, no. Good night," said the tutor, and walked off without further ceremony.

He still lingered, however, in descending the stairs; and yet more in passing the door of a parlour, whence came a murmur of voices. Finally, he let himself out at the street-door, and encountering a bleak gust of wind, set off down the silent street at a round pace.

"What a fool you are, Matthew!" was his mental ejaculation, as he strode along with his head bent down, and his gloveless hands plunged deep into his pockets.

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Errington had lodged in Mr. Maxfield's house ever since she first came to Whitford. Jonathan Maxfield, commonly called "Old Max," kept a general shop in that town. The shop was underneath Mrs. Errington's sitting-room, and the great bow window, of which mention has been made, jutted out beyond the shop front, and overhung the street. The house was old, and larger than it appeared from the street, running back some distance. There was a private entrance—a point much insisted upon by Mr. Maxfield's sister-in-law and housekeeper in letting the lodgings to Mrs. Errington—and a long passage divided the shop entirely from the dwelling rooms on the ground-floor.

Old Max was reported to be somewhat of a miser (which report he rather encouraged than the reverse, finding that it had its conveniences), and to have amassed a large sum of money for one in his position in life.

"Old Max!" Whitford people would say. "Why, old Max could buy up half the town. Old Max might retire to-morrow. Old Max has no need ever to stand behind a counter again."

Old Max, however, continued to stand behind his counter day after day, as he had done for the last thirty or forty years, and would serve a child with a pennyworth of gingerbread, or a rich man's cook with stores of bacon and flour, in an impartially crabbed manner.

He was a grey man: grey from head to foot. He had grey hair, closely cropped; twinkling grey eyes; and a grey stubble on his shaven chin. He usually wore a suit of coarse grey clothes, with black calico sleeves tied on at the elbow. But even these had an iron-grey hue, from being more or less dusted with flour; as, indeed, were all his garments, and even his face.

When Mrs. Errington first came to live in Whitford, Jonathan Maxfield was a widower for the second time. He had two sons by his first wife; and, by his second, one daughter, whose birth cost her mother's life. The sister of his first wife had kept house for him ever since his second widowhood. This woman, Betty Grimshaw by name, had been servant in a great family; and at her master's death had received a legacy, which, together with her own savings, had sufficed to purchase a small annuity. She had been able to

lay by the greater part of her annuity since she had lived in Whitford, and announced her intention of bequeathing her savings to her nephew James, Maxfield's second son. The elder son had married a farmer's daughter with some money, and turned farmer himself within a few miles of Whitford. Thus the family living at home on the autumn night on which our story opens, consisted of Jonathan Maxfield, Betty Grimshaw his sister-in-law, his son James, and his daughter Rhoda.

The sound of the street-door closing violently behind Mr. Diamond, startled this family party assembled in the parlour, together with Mr. David Powell, Methodist preacher.

They were all seated at a table, on which lay hymn-books and a large bible. Old Maxfield sat nearest to the fire, in his grey suit, just as he appeared in his shop, except that the black calico sleeves had been removed from his coat. He had a harsh face, a harsh voice, and a harsh manner. So much could be observed by any who exchanged ten words with him.

Next to him, on his left hand, sat his son James, a tall, sickly-looking young man, of six-and-twenty. He had a stoop in the shoulders, a pale face, with high cheek-bones, eyes deeply set, light eyebrows, which grew in thick irregular tufts, and hair of a reddish flaxen colour. There was a certain family likeness between him and his aunt,

Mrs. Grimshaw, as she was called in Whitford, despite her spinsterhood. She too was tall, bony, and hard-featured; with a face which looked as if it had been painted and varnished, and reminded one, in its colour and texture, of those hollow wooden pears, full of tiny playthings, which used to be—and probably still are—sold at country fairs, and in toy-shops of a humble kind.

The preacher sat next to Betty Grimshaw. He seemed to belong to a different order of beings from the three persons already described.

A striking face this—dark, and full of fire. He had sharply-cut, handsome features, and eyes that seemed to blaze with inward light when he spoke earnestly. His raven-black hair was worn long, and fell straight on to his collar. But although this made his aspect strange, it could not render it either vulgar or ludicrous. The black locks set off his pale dark face, as in a frame of ebony. He was young, and seemed vigorous, though rather with nervous energy than muscular strength.

The last person in the group was Rhoda Maxfield—"little Rhoda," as Mrs. Errington had called her. But the epithet had been used to express rather her social insignificance, than her physical proportions. Rhoda was, in fact, rather tall. She was about nineteen years old, but scarcely looked her age. She had a broad and beautiful brow, on

which the rich chestnut hair was smoothly parted; a sensitive mouth, not over-small; and bright hazel eyes, which looked out on the world with an open gaze, that was at once timid and confiding. Her skin was of remarkable delicacy, with a faint flush on the cheeks, which came and went frequently.

And yet Rhoda Maxfield was not much admired among her own compeers. There was something in her face which did not please the taste of the vulgar. And although, if you had asked Whitford persons "Is not Rhoda Maxfield wonderfully pretty?" most of those so addressed would have answered, "Yes, Rhoda is a pretty girl;" yet the assent would probably have been cold and uncertain.

Rhoda, at nineteen years old, had never been known to have a sweetheart. And this fact militated against the popular appreciation of her beauty; for a very cursory observation of the world will suffice to show that on the score of good looks, as on most other subjects, public opinion is apt to find nothing successful but success.

"What a wind there must be, to make the door bang like that!" exclaimed Betty Grimshaw, when the loud sound above recorded reached her ears.

"Who went out?" asked James.

"I suppose it would be that Mr. Diamond, the schoolmaster," replied his aunt.

They both spoke in a subdued voice, and cast

furtive glances at Mr. Maxfield, as though fearful of being reprehended for interrupting the evening devotions; but, as they spoke, he closed his hymn-book, and drew his chair away from the table towards the fireside. Upon this signal, Betty Grimshaw rose and bustled out of the room, declaring that she must see about getting the supper; for that that little Sarah could never be trusted to see to the roasted potatoes alone. There was a suspicious alacrity in Betty's departure, suggestive that she experienced some sense of relief at the breaking-up of the devotions. James soon sauntered out of the room after his aunt. Mr. Powell rose.

"Good night," said he, holding out his hand to the old man.

"Nay; won't you stay and eat with us, Brother Powell? The supper will be ready directly."

Mr. Powell shook his head. "You know I never eat supper," he said, smiling.

"Well, well; perhaps you're in the right," responded old Max, very readily.

"And I am not clear," continued the preacher, "but that it would be better for you to leave off the habit."

"Me? Oh, no! I need it for my health's sake."

"But would it not suit your health better, to take your supper early? Say at six o'clock or so;

so that you should not go to bed with a full stomach."

"No; it wouldn't," answered the old man, crabbedly.

David Powell stood meditating, with his hand to his chin. "I am not clear about it," he murmured. But Maxfield either did not hear, or chose to ignore the words.

"Father, may I go upstairs to Mrs. Errington?" asked Rhoda, softly; "I don't want any supper."

The old man grunted out an inarticulate sound, and seemed to hesitate. "Go upstairs to Mrs. Errington?" he said, answering his daughter, but looking sideways at the preacher. "Let's see; you promised, didn't you?"

"Yes; you gave me leave, and I promised before—before we knew that Mr. Powell would come to-night."

Rhoda was gifted with a sweet voice by nature, and she spoke with a purer accent, and expressed herself with greater propriety, than the other members of her family. Mrs. Errington had amused herself with teaching the motherless girl, who had been a lonely, shy, little child when their acquaintance first began. And Rhoda was a quick and apt scholar.

"Well—a promise—I can't have you break your word. Don't you stay late, mind. Not one minute after ten o'clock; do you mind, Rhoda?"

Rhoda, with a bright smile of pleasure on her face, promised to obey, and left the room with a step which it cost her an effort to make as staid as she knew would be approved by her father and Mr. Powell. When she got outside the door, they heard her run along the passage as light and as swift as a greyhound.

Maxfield turned to Mr. Powell, with a little constrained, apologetic air, and began expatiating on Mrs. Errington's fondness for Rhoda; and how kind she had always been to the girl; and how he thought it a duty almost, to let the good, widowed lady have as much of Rhoda's company as she could give her without neglecting duties.

"Betty Grimshaw is a worthy woman," he observed, drily; "but no companion for my Rhoda. Rhoda features her mother, and has her mother's nature very much."

Mr. Powell still stood in the same meditative attitude, with his hand to his chin.

"This Mrs. Errington is unconverted?" he said, without raising his eyes.

"Oh, Rhoda won't take much harm from that!"

"Much harm?" The dark lustrous eyes were upraised now, and fixed searchingly on the old man.

"Well, it won't do her any harm," the latter answered, testily. "I know Rhoda; and I have

her welfare at heart, as, I suppose, you'll believe. I don't know who should have, if it isn't me!"

"Brother Maxfield," said the preacher, earnestly, "are you sure that you have a clear leading in this matter? Have you prayed for one?"

Maxfield shifted in his chair, and made no answer.

"Oh, consider what you do in trusting that tender soul among worldlings! I do not say that these are wicked people in a carnal sense; but are they such as can edify or strengthen a young girl like Rhoda, who is still in a seeking state, and has not yet that blessed assurance which we all supplicate for her?"

"I have laid the matter before the Lord," said Maxfield, almost sullenly.

Powell was silent for a minute, standing with his hands forcibly clasped together, as though to control them from vehement action, and when next he spoke, his voice had a tone in it which told of a strong effort of will to keep it in subdued monotony.

"Then, have you thought of it?" said he; "there is the young man Algernon."

"What of Algernon?" cried Maxfield, turning sharply to face the preacher.

"He is fair to look upon, and specious, and has those graces and talents which the world accounts lovely. May there not be a snare here for Rhoda?

She who is so alive to all beauty and graciousness in God's world, and in God's creatures—may it not be very perilous for her to be thrown unguardedly into the society of this youth?"

Maxfield looked into the fire instead of at Powell, as he said, "What has been putting this into your head?"

"I have had a call to say it to you, for some time past. Before I went away this summer it was on my mind. I sinned in resisting the call, for—for reasons which matter to no one but myself. I sinned in putting any human reasons above my Master's service."

"It may be as you would have done better to resist speaking now," said Maxfield, slowly. "It may be as it was rather a temptation, than a leading from Heaven, made you speak at all."

Powell started back as if he had been struck. The blood rushed into his face, and then, suddenly receding, left him paler than before. But he answered after a moment in a low, sweet voice, and without a trace of anger, "You cannot mistrust me more than I mistrusted myself. But I have wrestled and prayed; and I am assured that I have spoken this thing with a single heart."

"Well, well, well, it may be as you say," said Maxfield, a shade less harshly than he had spoken before. "But you have neither wife, nor daughter, nor sister, and you cannot understand these mat-

ters as well as I do, who am more than double your years, and have had the guidance of this young maid from a baby upward."

"Nay," answered Powell, humbly; "it is not my own wisdom I am uttering! God forbid that I should set up my carnal judgment against a man of your years."

"That's very well said—very rightly said!" exclaimed Maxfield, nodding twice or thrice.

"Aye, but I must speak when my conscience bids me. I dare not resist that admonition for any human respect."

"Why, to be sure! But do you think yours is the only conscience to be listened to? I tell you I follow mine, young man. And you can ask any of our brethren here in Whitford, who have known me for the last thirty or forty years, whether I have gone far astray!"

Powell sighed wearily. "I have released my soul," he said.

"And just hearken," pursued old Maxfield, in a lowered voice, "don't say a word of this sort to Rhoda—nay, don't interrupt me! I've listened to your say, now let me have mine—because you might be putting something into her thoughts that wouldn't have come there of itself. And keep a discreet tongue before Betty and James. 'Least said, soonest mended.' And I'll tell you something more. If—observe I say 'if'—I saw

that Rhoda's heart was strongly set upon anything, anything as wasn't wrong in itself, I should be very loath to thwart her."

David Powell turned a startled, attentive face on the old man, who proceeded with a sort of dogged monotony of voice and manner: "Christian charity teaches us there's good folks in all communions of believers. And there's different ranks and different orders in the world; some has one thing, and some has another. Some has fine family and great connections among the rulers of the land. Others has the goods of this world earned by honesty, and diligence, and frugality; and these three bring a blessing. Some is fitted to be gentlefolks by nature, let 'em be born where they will. Others, like my sister-in-law Betty, is born to serve. We are all the Lord's creatures, and we are in his hand but as clay in the hands of the potter. But there's different kinds of clay, you know. This kind is good for making coarse delf, and that kind is fit for fine porcelain. We'll just keep these words as have passed between you and me, to ourselves, if you please. And now, I I think, we may drop the subject."

"May the Lord give you his counsel!" said Powell, in a broken voice.

"Amen! I have had my share of wisdom, and have walked pretty straight for the last half century, thanks be to Him," observed old Max, drily.

"If it were His good pleasure, how gladly would I cease for evermore from speaking to you on this theme! But it matters nothing what I desire or shrink from. I must deliver my Master's message when it is borne in upon me to do so."

And with a solemnly uttered blessing on the household, the preacher departed.

The master of the house sat thinking, alone by his fireside. He began by thinking that he had a little over-encouraged David Powell. Maxfield considered praise from himself to be very encouraging, and calculated to uplift the heart. When Powell had first come among the Whitford Methodists, old Max had taken him by the hand, and had declared him to be the most awakening preacher they had had for many years. He was never tired of vaunting Powell's zeal, and diligence, and eloquence. Backsliders were brought again into the right way, sinners were awakened, believers were refreshed, under his ministry. The fame of Powell's preaching drew many unwonted auditors to the little chapel; and of those who came at first merely from curiosity, many were moved by his words to join the Wesleyan Connection. On all this Jonathan Maxwell looked with great satisfaction. The young man had been truly a burning and a shining light.

But now—might it not be that the preacher's heart had become puffed up with spiritual pride?

Was he not unduly exalting himself, when he assumed a tone of censorship towards such a pillar of the community as Jonathan Maxfield? The old man had been for many years accustomed to much deference, alike from preachers and congregation. The exhortations and admonitions which were doubtless needful for his neighbours, were entirely out of place when addressed to himself. His piety and probity were established on a rock. And the Lord had, moreover, seen fit to gift him with so large a share of the wisdom of the serpent, as had enabled him to hold his own, and to thrive in the midst of worldlings. A dull fire of indignation against David Powell began to smoulder in the old man's heart, as he pondered these things.

Other thoughts, too, more or less disquieting, passed through his brain. He thought of Rhoda's mother—of that second wife whom he, a man past middle-life, had married for her fair young face and gentle ways, much to Betty Grimshaw's disgust, and the surprise of most people. He looked back on the long, dusty, dreary road of his life; and, in the whole landscape, the only spot on which the sun seemed to shine was that brief year of his second marriage. Not that he had been, or that he now was, an unhappy man. His life had satisfactions in it of a sober, sombre kind. He did not grow soft or sentimental in reviewing the past. He was accustomed to the chill, grey atmosphere

in which he lived. But he had felt warm sunlight once, and remembered it. And he had a notion—inarticulate, indeed, and vague—that Rhoda needed more light and warmth in her life than was necessary for his own existence, or for James's, or Betty Grimshaw's, or, in fact, for most people's. There was no amount of hardness he could not be guilty of to "most people," and, indeed, he was hard enough to himself; but for Rhoda there was a soft place in his heart.

Nevertheless, there were many hopes, fears, speculations, and reflections connected with Rhoda just now, which had anything but a softening effect on Mr. Maxfield's demeanour; insomuch that Betty and James, coming in presently to supper, found the head of the family in so crabbed a temper, that they were glad to hurry through the meal in silence, and slink off to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

Mention has been made of a whist-party at Dr. Bodkin's, to which Mrs. Errington announced her intention of going. It took place on the Thursday after that evening on which Mrs. Errington was first introduced to the reader: that is to say, on the second night following.

Whist-parties were almost the only social entertainment ever given amongst the genteel persons in Whitford. The Rev. Cyrus Bodkin, D.D., liked his rubber; so did Robert Smith, Esq., M.R.C.S., and Mr. Dockett, the attorney, and Miss Chubb, and one or two more cronies, who were frequently seen at the doctor's green card-tables.

The Bodkins lived in a gloomy stone house adjoining the grammar-school, of which, indeed, it formed part. The house was approached by a gravelled courtyard, surrounded by high stone walls. The garden at the back ran sloping down to a broad green meadow, which in turn was

bounded by the little river Whit, all overhung with willows, and covered by a floating mass of broad water-lily leaves, just opposite the doctor's garden gate.

In the full summer time, the view from the back of the house was pretty and pastoral enough. But in autumn and winter the meadow was a swamp, whose vivid green looked poisonous—as indeed it was, exhaling ague and rheumatism from its plashy surface—and a white brooding mist trailed itself, morning and evening, along the sluggish Whit, like a fallen cloud, condemned by some angry prince of the air to crawl serpent-like on earth, instead of soaring and sailing in the empyrean.

Such fancies never came into Doctor Bodkin's head, however, nor into his wife's either—good, anxious, unselfish, sad, little woman! Into his daughter Minnie's brain all sorts of wild, fantastic notions would intrude as she lay on her sofa, looking out upon the garden, and the river, and the meadow, and the gnarled old willows, and the flying scud in the sky; but she very seldom spoke of her fancies to any one. She spoke of other matters, though, freely enough. She had many visitors, who came and sat around her couch, or beside the lounging-chair, on which, on her good days, she reclined. She was better acquainted with the news of Whitford than most of the people

who could use their limbs to go abroad and see what was passing. She was interested in the progress of the boys at the grammar-school, and knew the names, and a good deal about the characters, of every one of them. She would chat, and laugh, and joke by the hour with the frequenters of her father's house; but of herself—of her own thoughts, feelings, and fancies—Minnie Bodkin said no word to them. Nor did she, in truth, ever speak much on that subject all her life. And there were days—black days in the calendar of her poor anxious little mother—when Minnie would remain shut into her room, refusing to see or speak with anyone, and suffering much pain of body, with a proud stoicism which rejected sympathy like a wall of granite.

There is no suggestion of granite about her now, however, as she lies, propped up by crimson cushions, on a sofa in her father's drawing-room. The room is bright and warm, despite the white kraken of mist that is coiled around the outer walls of the house. Wax-lights shine in tall, old-fashioned silver candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and on the centre table, and on a pianoforte, beside which stands a canterbury full of music-books. A great fire blazes in the grate, and makes its immediate neighbourhood too hot for the comfort of most people. But Minnie is apt to be chilly, and loves the heat. Some delicate ferns and hothouse

plants adorn a stand between the windows. They are rather a rare luxury in Whitford; but Minnie loves flowers, and always has some choice ones about her. A still rarer luxury hangs on the wall opposite to her sofa, in the shape of a very fine copy—on a reduced scale—of Raphael's Madonna di San Sisto. Minnie had fallen in love with a print from that famous picture long ago, and the copy was procured for her at considerable pains and expense. The furniture of the room is of crimson and dark oak. Minnie delights in rich colours and picturesque combinations. In a word, there is not an inch of the apartment, from floor to ceiling, in the arrangement of which Minnie's tastes have not been consulted, and in which traces of Minnie's influence are not plainly to be seen by those who know that household.

Minnie has a face, which, if you saw it represented in time-darkened oil colours, and framed on the walls of a picture-gallery, you would pronounce strikingly beautiful. Such faces are sometimes seen in flesh and blood, and, strange to say, do by no means excite the same enthusiasm in ordinary beholders, who, for the most part, like the picturesque in a picture and nowhere else; and who, to paraphrase what was said of Voltaire's intellect, admire chiefly those women who have, more than other young ladies, the prettiness which all young ladies have.

Minnie's face is pale and rather sallow. Her skin is not transparent, but fine in texture, like fine vellum, and it seldom changes its hue from emotion. When it does, it grows dark-red or deadly-white. Pleasing blushes or pallors are never seen on it. She has dark, thick hair, worn short, and brushed away from a high, smooth, rounded forehead, in which shine a pair of bright brown eyes, under finely-arched eyebrows. But the beauty of the face lies in the perfection of its outlines: brow, cheeks, and chin are alike delicately moulded; her mouth —although the lips are too pale—is almost faultless, as are the white, small teeth she shows when she smiles. There is an indefinable air of sickness and suffering over this beautiful face, and dark traces beneath the eyes, and a pathetic, weary look in them sometimes; but, when she speaks or smiles, you forget all that.

There are people in this world whose intellects remind one of lamps too scantily supplied with oil. The little feeble flame in them burns and flickers, certainly, but it is but a dull sort of dead light after all. Now Minnie Bodkin's spirit-lamp, if the phrase may be permitted, illumined everything it shone upon, and there were some persons who found it a great deal too dazzling to be pleasant.

It is not at all too bright at this moment for Algernon Errington, who, seated close beside her couch, is giving her, sotto voce, a humorous imita-

tion of the psalm-singing in old Max's parlour; and describing, with great relish, his mother's cool suggestion that the family prayers should be put off until she should be absent at a whist-party.

"Poor dear mother," says Algernon, smiling, "she can't forget that she is an Ancram; and sometimes comes out with one of her grande dame speeches, as if she were addressing my grandfather's Warwickshire tenantry forty years ago!" At which simple, candid words Minnie shoots out a queer, keen glance at the young fellow from under her eyelids.

"And the Methodist preacher—what is he like?" she asks. "Whitford is, or was, a little inclined to go crazed about him. I don't know whether the enthusiasm is burning itself out, as such fires of straw will do, but a few weeks ago I heard that the little Wesleyan chapel was crowded to overflowing whenever he preached; and that once or twice, when he addressed the people out of doors on Whit Meadow, there was such a multitude as never was seen there before. I was quite curious to see the man who could so move our sluggish Whitfordians."

Algernon had taken up a sheet of note-paper and a pen from Minnie's letter-writing table, whilst she was speaking. "Look here," he says, "here's the preacher!" And he holds out the paper on which

he has drawn, with a few rapid strokes, a caricature of David Powell.

Minnie looks at it with raised eyebrows.

"Oh," says she, "is he like that? I am disappointed. This is the common, conventional, long-haired Methodist, that one sees in every comic print."

And in truth Algernon's portrait is not a good likeness, even for a caricature. He had drawn a lank, hook-nosed man, with long, black hair, expressed by two blots of ink falling on either side of his face.

"He wears his hair just like that!" says Algy, contemplating his own work with a good deal of satisfaction.

The card playing has not yet begun. Mrs. Bodkin, small, thin, with a questioning, sharp, little nose, and a chin which narrows off too suddenly, and an odd resemblance altogether to a little melancholy fox, is presiding at a tea-table. Besides tea and coffee, it is furnished with substantial cakes of many various kinds. Whitford people, for the most part, dine early, so that they are ready for solid food again by about eight o'clock; and will, probably, sustain nature once more with sandwiches and mulled wine before they sleep.

It is not a large party. There is Mrs. Errington, majestic in a dyed silk, and a real lace cap, the

latter a relic of the "better days" she is fond of reverting to; Miss Chubb, a stout spinster, with a languishing fat face as round as a full moon, and little rings of hair gummed down all over her forehead, and half-way down her plump cheeks; Mr. Smith, the surgeon, black-eyed, red-faced, and smiling; the Rev. Peter Warlock, curate of St. Chad's, a serious, ghoul-like young man, who rends great bits out of his muffin with his teeth, in a way to make you shudder if you happen to be nervous or fanciful; Mr. Dockett, the attorney, and his wife, each dressed in black, each with a huge double chin and smothered voice, and altogether comically like one another.

On the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, and his coffee-cup in his hand, stands Dr. Bodkin. He is short and thick. He has an air of command. He looks at the world in general as if it were liable to an "imposition" of ever so many hundred lines of Latin poetry, and as if he were ready to enforce the penalty at brief notice. He is not a hard man at heart, but nature has made him conceited, and habit has made him a tyrant. The boys kotoo to him in the school, and his wife bends submissively to his will at home. There is only one person in the world who habitually opposes and sets aside his assumption of infallibility, and that person—his daughter Minnie—he loves and fears. He tramples on most other people, in the firm persuasion that it

is for their good. He is bald, large-faced, with a long upper-lip, which he shoots out into a funnel shape when he talks. He is an honest man in his calling, has a fair share of routine learning, and imparts it laboriously to the boys under his tuition.

Presently the people seem to slacken in eating and drinking. "Another cup of tea, Mrs. Errington? Won't you try any of that pound cake, Mr. Warlock?" (N.B. He has eaten three muffins unassisted; but they do not prosper with him. He has a hungry glare.) "Mrs. Dockett? No?" Mrs. Bodkin looks round, and lifts her meek, foxy little nose interrogatively at each member of the circle. No one will eat or drink more. The doctor prepares to make up the tables.

The card-tables are always set out in an inner drawing-room, adjoining that in which our friends are taking tea. Dr. Bodkin hates to hear any noise when he is at his rubber, so there are thick curtains before the door of communication between the two rooms; and the door is shut, and the curtains drawn, whenever Minnie desires to have music on whist evenings.

The sound of the piano penetrates to the card-players, nevertheless. But Mrs. Bodkin declares that she can never hear a note, when she is in the little drawing-room, with the door shut, and the curtains drawn. And although the doctor wears a

frown on his bald forehead, and is more than ordinarily severe on his partner whenever the piano begins to sound during a game, yet he never takes any step to have the instrument silenced.

The players file off in the wake of the host. There is a quartet at the doctor's table. At another, Mrs. Dockett, Mrs. Warlock, and Mr. Smith play dummy. Algernon Errington hates cards, and—naturally—doesn't play. The Rev. Peter Warlock also hates cards, but is wanted to make up the rubber, and—naturally—plays. Mrs. Bodkin hovers between the two rooms, and Minnie and Algernon are left almost tête-à-tête.

"And so you really, really think of going to London?" says Minnie gravely.

"To seek my fortune!" answers Algernon, with a smile. "Turn a-gain, Er-ring-ton—I don't know why that shouldn't be rung out on Bow Bells. You see my name has the same number of syllables as Whit-ting-ton! I declare that is a good omen!"

"Whittington made himself useful to the cook, and took care of his kitten. I wonder what you will do, Algy, to deserve fortune?"

"Do you think fortune favours the deserving? They paint her as a woman!" cries Master Algernon, with a saucy grimace.

"Algy, I like you. We are old chums. Have you considered this step? Have you any reason-

able prospect of making your way, if you refuse the Bristol man's proposition."

Minnie seldom speaks so earnestly as she is speaking now; still seldomer volunteers any inquiry into other people's affairs. Algernon is sensible of the distinction, and flattered by it. He forthwith proceeds to lay his hopes and plans before her; that is to say, he talks a great deal with astonishing candour and fluency, and says wonderfully little. His mother is so anxious; these Seeleys are her people. It would vex the dear old lady so terribly, if he were to prefer the Bristol side of the house! Though, perhaps, that would be, selfishly speaking, the right policy.

"Ah, I see!" exclaims Minnie, sinking back among her cushions when he has done speaking.

By-and-by, one or two more guests drop in: young Pawkins, of Pudcombe Hall, some six miles from Whitford; Lieutenant-Colonel Whistler, on half-pay, with his two nieces, Rose and Violet McDougall; and with them Alethea Dockett, who is still a day-boarder at a girls' school in Whitford, and has been spending the afternoon with the Misses McDougall. The latter young ladies never play whist. Little Ally Dockett sometimes takes a hand, if need be, and acquits herself not discreditably; but sixteen rushes in where two-and-thirty fears to tread. Rose and Violet are on the

doubtful border-land of life, and keep up a brisk skirmishing warfare with their enemy, Time. They would not give that wily old traitor the triumph of putting themselves at a whist-table for—for anything short of a bonâ fide offer of marriage, with a good settlement.

All those guests Minnie receives very graciously, with a sort of royal condescension. She is quite unconscious that the Misses McDougall (of whose intelligence she has, truth to say, a disdainful estimate) are alive to the fact that she thinks them fools, and that they take a good deal of credit to themselves for bearing with her airs, poor thing! But then she is so afflicted!

"Oh, Minnie, what's that? Do let me see! Is it one of your caricatures, you wicked thing?" cries Rose, darting on the portrait of David Powell.

"It's better drawn than Minnie can do," says Violet, with an air of having evidence wrung from her on oath.

"It may be that, and yet not very good," answers Minnie carelessly. "Mr. Errington has been trying to give me an idea of some one I've never seen, and probably never shall see."

"It's the Methodist preacher, by Jove!" says young Pawkins with his glass in his eye. "I heard him and saw him last summer on Whit Meadow."

Colonel Whistler, after holding the paper out at

the utmost stretch of his arm, solemnly puts on a pair of gold spectacles and examines it.

"Monstrous good!" he pronounces. "Very well, Errington! That's just the cut of that kind of fellow."

"Have you seen him, colonel?" asks Minnie.

"No—no; I can't say I have seen him. Don't like these irregular practitioners, Miss Minnie. But I know the sort of fellow. That's just the cut of 'em!"

"I wish I could draw, Miss Bodkin," says a voice behind Minnie at the head of the sofa; "I would show you a better likeness of the man than that!"

Minnie puts her thin white hand over her shoulder to the new comer, whom she cannot see. "Mr. Diamond!" she exclaims very softly.

"How can you tell?"

"I know your voice."

CHAPTER V.

The little group round Minnie's sofa dispersed as Mr. Diamond came forward. He was barely known by sight to most of them, and merely bowed gravely and shyly, without speaking.

"Who's that?" asked Colonel Whistler, in a loud whisper, of his eldest niece. "Eh? oh! ah! second master—yes, yes, yes; to be sure!" And the gallant gentleman walked off to the card-room, and joined the party at Mrs. Dockett's table, where there was a vacant place. It must be owned that the colonel's appearance was by no means rapturously hailed there. He was a notoriously bad player. Fate, however, allotted him as a partner to Mr. Warlock. Mrs. Dockett and Mr. Smith exchanged glances of satisfaction, and the gloom on Mr. Warlock's brow perceptibly deepened as the colonel, polite, smiling, and eager for the fray, took his seat opposite to that clerical victim.

"Algy, give Mr. Diamond your chair," said

Miss Bodkin. It was in this imperious manner that she occasionally addressed her young friend. In her eyes he was still a school-boy. And then she was four years his senior, and had been a young woman grown when he was still playing marbles and munching toffy.

Algy by no means considered himself a school-boy, but he had excellent tact and temper. He rose directly, shook hands with his tutor, and then standing opposite to Minnie, put his knuckles to his forehead, after the fashion in vogue amongst rustic children by way of salute, and said meekly, "Yes'm, please'm."

Minnie laughed. "You don't mind, do you, Algernon?" she said, looking up at him.

"Not at all, Miss Bodkin. You have merely cast another blight over my young existence. I am growing to look like the reverend Peter, in consequence of your ill-usage. Don't you perceive a ghastly hue upon my brow? No? Ah, well, you would if you had any feeling. Here, let me put this cushion better for you. Will that do?"

"Capitally, thanks. And, look here, Algy; I can't bear any music to-night, so will you get mamma to set the McDougalls down to a round game? And play yourself, there's a good boy!"

"Oh, Minnie, you ought to have been Mrs. Nero. There never was such a tyrant. Well, Pawkins and I must make ourselves agreeable, I

suppose. For England, home, and beauty—here goes!" And Algernon speedily had the two Miss McDougalls, and Mr. Pawkins, and Alethea Dockett engaged in a game of vingt-et-un—played in a very infantine manner by the first-named ladies, and with a good deal of business-like gravity by little Alethea, who liked to win.

Mr. Diamond looked at the group with his hand over his mouth, after his habit.

"Isn't he a nice fellow?" asked Minnie, watching Mr. Diamond's face curiously.

"Errington?"

"Of course!"

"Very."

"But now, tell me—do sit down here; I want to talk to you. You come so seldom. I wonder why you came to-night?"

"I chanced to meet Mrs. Bodkin in the street, and she asked me so pressingly—she is so good!"

Minnie's face wore a pained look. "It is a pity mamma should have teased you," she said, in a low voice.

Matthew Diamond took no notice of the words. Perhaps he did not hear them. "I am not fit to go to evening parties," he continued. "The very wax-lights dazzle me. I feel like a bat or an owl."

"Too wise for your company, that means!"

"How can you say so? No: I assure you I was compared to an owl the other evening by a lady, and I felt the justice of the comparison."

"By a lady! What lady?"

Mr. Diamond smiled a little amused smile at the authoritative tone of the question. Minnie did not see it. She was leaning her elbow on a cushion, and had her face turned towards Mr. Diamond; but her eyes, which usually looked out, open and unabashed, were half veiled by their lids.

"The lady was Mrs. Errington," answered the tutor, after a moment's pause.

"She called you an owl? That eagle? Well, she has this aquiline quality; I believe she could stare the sun himself out of countenance!"

"You were asking me to tell you——" said Mr. Diamond.

"To tell me——? Oh, yes; about the Methodist preacher. That caricature is not like him, you say?"

"Not at all. It is a vulgar conception of the man."

"And the man is not vulgar? I am glad of that! Tell me about him."

Matthew Diamond had heard the preacher more than once. The first time had been by chance on Whit Meadow. The other times were in the crowded, close Wesleyan chapel, into which he had penetrated at the cost of a good deal of

personal inconvenience, so greatly had Powell's eloquence impressed him.

"The man is like a flame of fire," he said. "It is wonderful! He must be like Garrick, according to the descriptions I have heard. And, then, this fellow is so handsome—wild and oriental-looking. I always long to clap a turban on his head, and a great flowing robe over his shoulders."

Minnie listened eagerly, with parted lips, to all that Diamond would tell her of the preacher.

"That is for his manner," she said, at length. "Now, as to the matter?"

Mr. Diamond paused. "The man is an enthusiast, you know," he answered, gravely.

"But as to his doctrine? Give me some idea of the kind of thing he says."

"Not now."

"Yes; now. This moment."

"Excuse me; I cannot enter into the subject now."

Minnie raises her brown eyes to his steel-grey ones, and then drops her own quickly.

"Will you ever?" she asks, meekly.

"Perhaps. I don't know."

Miss Bodkin is not accustomed to be answered with such unceremonious curtness; but, perhaps on account of its novelty, Mr. Diamond's blunt disregard of her requests (in that house Minnie's requests have the weight of commands) does not

ruffle her. She bears it with the most perfect sweetness, and proceeds to discourse of other things.

"Don't you think it a pity," she says, "that Algernon Errington should have refused his cousin's offer?"

"A great pity—for him."

"Ah! you think Mr. Filthorpe of Bristol is not to be condoled with on the occasion?"

Mr. Diamond's firmly closed lips remain immovable.

Minnie looks at him wistfully, and then says suddenly, "Do you know I like Algy very much! There is something so bright and winning and gay about him! I have known him so long—ever since he came here as a small child in a frock. And papa knew his father, Dr. Errington. He was a very clever man, a brilliant talker, and greatly sought after in society. Algy inherits all that. And he has—what they say his father had not—a temper that is almost perfect, thoroughly sound and sweet. I wish you liked him."

"Who tells you that I do not like him? You are mistaken in fancying so. I think Errington one of the most winning fellows I ever knew in my life."

"Y-yes; but you don't think so well of him as I do."

"Perhaps that is hardly to be expected! And pardon me, Miss Bodkin, but you don't know——"

"I know nothing about your thoughts on the subject!" interrupts Minnie quickly, and with a bright, mischievous glance. "Forgive my interrupting you; but when I am to have a cold shower-bath, I like to pull the string myself. Now it's over."

"You think me a terrible bear," says Diamond, looking down on her beautiful, animated face.

"Ah! take care. If I know nothing about your thoughts, how do you pretend to guess mine? Besides, I am not so zoological in my choice of epithets as your friend, Mrs. Errington. Papa nearly quarrelled with that lady on the subject of Algy's going away. But, you know, it is not all Mrs. Errington's fault. Algy chooses to try his fortune under the auspices of Lord Seely—I can see that plainly enough. And what Algy chooses his mother chooses. He has been terribly spoiled."

"It is a great misfortune——"

"To be spoiled?"

"For him to have lost his father when he was a child. Otherwise he might not have been so pampered: though fathers spoil their children sometimes!"

"Mine spoils me, I think. But then there is an excuse, after all, for spoiling me."

"My dear Miss Bodkin, you cannot suppose that I had any such meaning."

"You? Oh, no! You are honest: you never

speak in innuendoes. But it is true, you know. My father and mother have spoiled me. Poor father and mother! I am but a miserable, frail little craft for them to have ventured so much love and devotion in!"

It was not in mortal man—not even in mortal man whose heart was filled with a passion for another woman—to refrain from a tender glance and a soft tone, in answer to Minnie's pathetic little plaint. Her beauty and her intellect might be resisted: her helplessness, and acknowledgment of peculiar affliction, could not be.

"Ah!" said Matthew Diamond; "who would not embark all their freight of affection in such a venture as the hope that you would love them again? I think your parents are paid."

It has been said that Mr. Diamond's calm, grave face raised an indefinite expectation in the beholder. When he said those words to Minnie Bodkin, you would have thought, if you had been watching him, that you had found the key of the puzzle, and that an ineffable tenderness was the secret that lay hid beneath that grave mask. The stern mouth smiled, the stern eyes beamed, the straight brows were lifted in a compassionate curve. Minnie had never seen his face with that look on it, and the change in it gave her a curious pang, half of pain, half of pleasure. Strong conflicting feelings battled in her. She was strung to

a high pitch of excitement; and her eyes brightened, and her pulse beat quicker—all for a look, a smile, a beam of the eye from this staid, quiet schoolmaster! What do we know of the thought in our neighbour's brain? of the thrill that makes his heart flutter? We do not care for this air-bubble. How can he? It is yonder beautiful transparent ball, all radiant with prismatic colours, that we expend our breath upon. Up it goes—up, up, up—look! No; our stupid neighbour is watching his own airy sphere, which is not nearly so beautiful; and which, we know, will burst presently!

The game of vingt-et-un comes to an end. Almost at the same moment the whist-players break up, and come trooping into the drawing-room; trooping and talking rather noisily, to say the truth, as though to indemnify themselves for the silence which Doctor Bodkin insists upon during the classic game. Mrs. Bodkin bustles up to her daughter; hopes she is not tired; thinks she looks a little fagged; wonders why she did not have any music, as she generally likes Rose McDougall's Scotch ballads; supposes Mr. Diamond preferred not to play, as she sees he has been sitting out, and trusts he has not been bored.

But of all the people present, Mrs. Bodkin alone guesses that Minnie has enjoyed her evening, and why. And, with her mother's and woman's

instinct, she knows that Minnie's pleasure would have been spoiled by guessing that it had been guessed. For the rest, this small anxious-faced woman cares but little. She would tear your feelings to mince-meat to feed the fancies of her daughter, as ruthlessly as any maternal vixen would slay a chicken for her cubs; although, for herself, no hare is milder or more timid.

The Misses McDougall are in good spirits. They have won, and they have had the two young men all to themselves, for Ally Dockett in short frocks doesn't count. Also Minnie Bodkin has kept aloof. That bright lamp of hers is not favourable to such twinkling little rushlights as Rose and Violet are able to display. But this evening they have not been quenched by a superior luminary, and are quite radiant and cheerful. Dr. Bodkin, too, is contented in his lofty manner; for there has been no music, and he has enjoyed his rubber in peace. Colonel Whistler has lost, but the stakes are always modest at Dr. Bodkin's table, and he doesn't mind it. Over the feelings of the Rev. Peter Warlock it will, perhaps, be best to draw a veil. The reverend gentleman stalks in, and sits down in a corner, whence he can stare at Minnie unobserved. It is the only comfort he enjoys throughout the evening. And for this he thinks it worth while to submit to the *peine forte et dure* of playing whist, with Colonel Whistler for his partner.

Mrs. Errington sails towards Minnie's sofa, and suddenly stops short, and opens her eyes very wide.

Mr. Diamond, who is the object of her gaze, rises and bows. "Good evening, madam," he says, unable to repress a smile at her manifest astonishment on beholding him there.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Diamond? Dear me! I little expected to see you this evening. Dear Minnie, how are you now? Well, this is a surprise!"

Then, as Mr. Diamond moves away, Mrs. Errington takes his chair beside Minnie, and says to her confidentially—"Now, I hope, Minnie, you won't owe me a grudge for it; but I must confess that if it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have had that gentleman to entertain this evening."

"What on earth do you mean?" cries Minnie, with scant ceremony, and flashes an impatient glance at the lady's soft, smiling, self-satisfied visage.

"My dear, I advised him to come here a little oftener. I think he felt diffident, you know, and all that. Poor man, he is rather dull, although Algy is always crying up his talents. But it really is kind to bring him forward a little. I asked him to tea the other night. You see he must feel it a good deal when people are affable, and so on, for"—here her voice sank to a whisper —"he told me himself that he had been a sizar."

With all which benevolent remarks Miss Bodkin is, of course, highly delighted. She does not forget them either; for after the negus has been drunk, and the sandwiches eaten, and the company has departed, she says to her father, "Papa, was Mr. Diamond a sizar?"

"I don't know, child. Very likely. None the worse for that, if he were."

"The worse! No!" returns Minnie, with a superb smile.

"Who says he was?"

"Mrs. Errington."

"Pooh! Ten to one it isn't true then. She has her good points, poor woman, but the Ancrams are all liars; every one of them! Greatest liars in all the Midland Counties. It runs in the family, like gout."

"It does not seem likely, certainly, that Mr. Diamond should have confided the circumstance to Mrs. Errington," observed Minnie, thoughtfully.

"Confided! No; I never knew a man less likely to confide anything to anybody."

"However, after all, it is a thing which all the world might know, isn't it, papa?"

Dr. Bodkin was not interested in the question. He gave a great loud yawn, and declared it was time for Minnie to go to bed.

"It doesn't follow that I'm sleepy because you yawn, papa!" she said saucily.

"You are tired though, puss! I see it in your face. Go to bed. Mrs. Bodkin, get Minnie off to rest."

He bent to kiss his daughter, and bid her good night.

"Say 'God bless' me, papa," she whispered, drawing his head down and kissing his forehead.

"Don't I always say it? God bless you, my darling!"

There were tears in Minnie's eyes as she turned her head away among her cushions. But nobody saw them. She talked to the maid who undressed her about Mr. Powell, the Methodist preacher, and asked her if she had heard him, and what the folks said about him in the town.

"No, Miss Minnie. I've never heard him, and I know master wouldn't think it right for any of us to be going to a dissenting chapel. But I do think as there's some good to be got there, miss. For my brother Richard, him that lives groom at Pudcombe Hall—he went and got—got 'conversion,' I think they call it, at Mr. Powell's. And since then he's never touched a drop of liquor, nor a bad word never comes out of his mouth. And he says he's quite happy and comfortable in his mind, miss."

"Is he? How I envy him!"

CHAPTER VI.

It is exceedingly disagreeable to find that a scheme you have set your head on, or a prospect which smiles before you, is displeasing to the persons who surround you. It gives a cold shock to the glow of anticipation.

Algernon did not perhaps care to sympathise very keenly with other folks' pleasure, but he certainly desired that they should be pleased with what pleased him, which is not quite the same thing.

His mother informed him—perhaps with a dash of the Ancram colouring; although we have seen how unjustly the worthy lady was suspected of falsehood by Dr. Bodkin on a late occasion—that Mr. Diamond disapproved of his refusing Mr. Filthorpe's offer, and of his resolve to go to London. Dr. Bodkin, Algernon knew, did not approve it; neither did Minnie, although she had never said so in words. How unpleasantly chilly people were, to be sure!

Mrs. Errington did not like Mr. Diamond. She mistrusted him. His silence and gravity, his odd sarcastic smiles, and taciturn politeness, made her uneasy. Despite the patronising way in which she had spoken of him to Minnie Bodkin, in her heart she thought the young man to be horribly presuming.

"I'm sure he doesn't appreciate you at all, Algy," she declared, winding up a list of Mr. Diamond's defects and misdemeanours with this culminating accusation.

Algy had a shrewd notion that Mr. Diamond's appreciation of himself was likely to be a just one, and he was a little vexed and discomfited, that his tutor had given him no word of praise behind his back. Mrs. Errington saw that she had made an impression, and began to heighten and embellish her statements accordingly. "But, my dear boy," said she, "how can we expect him to recognise talents like yours—gentlemanly talents, so to speak? The man himself is a mere plodder. Why, he was a sizar at college!"

Algy felt himself to be a very generous fellow for continuing to "stand up for old Diamond," as he phrased it.

"Well, ma'am, plenty of great men have been poor scholars. Dean Swift was a sizar."

"And Dean Swift died in a madhouse! So you see, Algy!"

Mrs. Errington plumed herself a good deal upon this retort, and returned to the attack upon Mr. Diamond with fresh vigour; being one of those persons whose mode of warfare is elephantine, and who, never content with merely killing their enemy, must ponderously stamp and mash every semblance of humanity out of him.

Algernon did not like all this. His vanity was —at least during this period of his life—a great deal more vulnerable than his mother's. And she, although she doated on him, would say unpleasant things, indignantly repeat mortifying remarks which had been made, and in a hundred ways unconsciously wound the sensitive love of approbation which was one of Algernon's tenderest (not to say weakest) points.

It was all very disagreeable. But it was not the worst he had to look forward to. There was one person who would be so cast down, so despairing, at the news of his going away, that—that—it would be quite painful for a fellow to witness such grief. And yet it could not be expected—it could never have been expected—that he should stay in Whitford all his life! He must point that out to Rhoda.

Poor Rhoda!

For ten years, that is to say for more than half her life, Algernon Errington had been an idol, a hero, to her. From the first day when, peeping

from behind the parlour door, she had beheld the strangers enter—Mrs. Errington, majestic, in a huge hat and plume, such as young readers may have seen in obsolete fashion books (the mode was so absurd fifty years ago, and had none of that simple elegance which distinguishes your costume, my dear young lady), and Algy, a lovely fair child, in a black velvet suit and falling collar—from that moment the boy had been a radiant apparition in her imagination. How small, and poor, and shabby she felt, as she peeped out of the parlour at that beautiful, blooming mother and son! Not poor and shabby in a milliner's sense of the word, but literally of no account, or beauty, or value, in the world, little shy motherless thing! She had an intense delight in beauty, this Whitford grocer's daughter. And all her little life the craving for beauty in her had been starved: not wilfully, but because the very conception of such food as would wholesomely have fed it, was wanting in the people with whom she lived.

That was a great day when she first, by chance, attracted Mrs. Errington's notice. She was too timid and too simple to scheme for that end, as many children would have done, although she tremblingly desired it. What a surprisingly splendid sight was the tortoise-shell work-box, full of amber satin and silver! What a delightful revelation the sound of the old harpsichord, touched

by Mrs. Errington's plump white fingers! What a perennial source of wonder and admiration were that lady's accomplishments, and condescension, and kind soft voice!

As to Algernon, there never was such a clever and brilliant little boy. At eight years old he could sing little songs to his mother's accompaniment, in the sweetest piping voice. He could recite little verses. He even drew quite so that you could tell—or Rhoda could—his trees, houses, and men from one another.

In all the stories his mother told about the greatness of her family, and in all the descriptions she gave of her ancestral home in Warwickshire, Rhoda's imagination put in the boy as the central figure of the piece. She could see him in the great hall hung round with armour; although she knew that he had never been in the family mansion in his life; in the grand drawing-room, with its purple carpet and gilt furniture; above all, in the long portrait gallery, of which Rhoda was never tired of hearing. Heaven knows how she, innocently, and Mrs. Errington, exercising her hereditary talent, embellished and transformed the old brick house in its deer park; or what enchanted landscapes the child at all events conjured up, among the gentle slopes and tufted woods of Warwickshire!

Even the period of hobbledehoydom, fatal to beauty, to grace, almost to civilised humanity in

most schoolboys, Algernon passed through triumphantly. He had a great sense of humour, and fastidious pampered habits of mind and body, which enabled him to look down with more or less disdain—a good-humoured disdain, always, Algy was never bitter—upon the obstreperous youth at the Whitford Grammar School.

One fight he had. He was forced into it by circumstances, against his will. Not that he was a coward, but he had a greater, and more candidly expressed regard for the ease and comfort of his body, than his schoolfellows conceived to be compatible with pluck. However, our young friend, if less stoical, was a great deal cleverer than the majority of his peers; and perceiving that the moment had arrived when he must either fight or lose caste altogether, he frankly accepted the former alternative. He fought a boy bigger and heavier than himself, got beaten (not severely, but fairly well beaten) and bore his defeat—in the dialect of his compeers, "took his licking"—admirably. He was quite as popular afterwards, as if he had thrashed his adversary, who was a loutish boy, the cock of the school, as to strength. Had he bruised his way to the perilous glory of being cock of the school himself, it would have behoved him to maintain it against all comers; which is an anxious and harassing position. Algy had not vanquished the victor, but he had "taken his licking like a

trump," and, on the whole, may be said to have achieved his reputation, at the smallest cost possible under the circumstances.

His mother and Rhoda almost shrieked at beholding his bruised cheek, and bleeding lip, when he came home one half-holiday, from the field of battle. Algy laughed as well as his swollen features would let him, and calmed their feminine apprehensions. Nor would he accept his fond parent's enthusiastic praise of his heroism, mingled with denunciations of "that murderous young ruffian, Master Mannit."

"Pooh, ma'am," said the hero, "it's all brutal and low enough. We bumped and thumped each other as awkwardly as possible. I fought because I was obliged. And I didn't like it, and I shan't fight again if I can help it. It is so stupid!"

The young fellow's great charm was to be unaffected. Even his fine-gentlemanism sat quite easily on him, and was displayed with the frankest good humour. Some one reproached him once with being more nice than wise. "We can't all be wise, but we needn't be nasty!" returned Algy, with quaint gravity. His temper was, as Minnie Bodkin had said, nearly perfect. He had a singular knack of disarming anger or hostility. You could not laugh Algernon out of any course he had set his heart upon—a rare kind of strength at his age—but it was ten to one he would laugh you

into agreeing with him. Every one of his little gifts and accomplishments was worth twice as much in him as it would have been in clumsier hands.

If you had a heartache, I do not think that you would have found Algy's companionship altogether soothing. Sorrow is apt to feel the very sunshine cruelly bright and cheerful. But if you were merry and wanted society: or bored, and wanted amusement: or dull and wanted exhilarating, no better companion could be desired.

He was genial with his equals, affable to his inferiors, modest towards his superiors—and had not a grain of veneration in his whole composition.

At seventeen years old Algernon left the Grammar School. But he continued to "read" with Mr. Diamond for nearly a twelvemonth. "My son is studying the classics with Mr. Diamond," Mrs. Errington would say; "I can't send my boy to the University, where all his forefathers distinguished themselves. But he has had the education of a gentleman."

It was a very desultory kind of reading at the best, and it was interrupted by the long Midsummer holidays, during which Mr. Diamond went away from Whitford, no one knew exactly whither. And during these same holidays, Mrs. Errington, who said she required change of air, had taken lodgings in a little quiet Welsh village, and

obtained Mr. Maxfield's permission to have Rhoda with her.

That was a time of joy for the girl. It did not at all detract from Rhoda's happiness, that she was required to wait hand and foot on Mrs. Errington; to bring her her breakfast in bed; to trim her caps, to mend her stockings; to iron out scraps of fine lace and muslin; to walk with her when she was minded to stroll into the village; to order the dinner; to make the pudding—a culinary operation too delicate for the fingers of the rustic with whom they lodged—to listen to her patroness when it pleased her to talk; and to play interminable games of cribbage with her when she was tired of talking. All these things were a labour of love to Rhoda. And Mrs. Errington was kind to the girl in her own way.

And above all, was not Algy there? Those were happy days in the Welsh village. On the long delicious summer afternoons, when Mrs. Errington was asleep after dinner, Rhoda would sit out of doors with her sewing; on a bench under the parlour window, so as to be within call of her patroness; and Algy would lounge beside her with a book; or make short excursions to get her wild flowers, which he would toss into her lap, laughing at her ecstasy of gratitude. "Oh, Algy!" she would cry, "Oh, how good of you! How lovely they are!" The words written down are not

eloquent, but Rhoda's looks and tones made them so.

"They are not half so lovely," Algy would answer, "as properly educated garden flowers; nor so sweet either. But I know you like that sort of herbage."

Rhoda never forgot those days. How should she forget them?—since it was at this period that Algernon first discovered that he was in love with her. Perhaps he might never have made the discovery if they had all stayed at Whitford. There he saw her, as he had seen her since her childhood, surrounded by coarse common people, and living their life, more or less. It is not every one who can be expected to recognise your diamond, if you set it in lead. Rhoda was always sweet, always gentle, always pretty, but she formed part and parcel of old Max's establishment. When the boy and girl were quite small, she used to help him with his lessons (her one year's seniority made a greater difference between them then, than it did later) and had always been used to do him sisterly service in a hundred ways. And all this was by no means favourable to the young gentleman's falling in love with her.

But at Llanryddan, Rhoda appeared under quite a different aspect. She looked prettier than ever before, Algernon thought. And perhaps she really was so; for there is no such cosmetic for the com-

plexion as happiness. Apart from her vulgar relations, and treated as a lady by the few strangers with whom they came in contact, it was surprising to find how good her manners were, and how much natural grace she possessed. Mrs. Errington had taught her what may be termed the technicalities of polite behaviour. From her own heart and native sensibility she had learnt the essentials. The people in the village turned their heads to admire her, as she walked modestly along. Who could help admiring her? Algernon decided that there was not one among the young ladies of Whitford who could compare with Rhoda. "She is ten times as pretty as those raw-boned McDougalls, and twenty times as well bred as Alethea Dockett, and ever so much cleverer than Miss Pawkins," he reflected. Minnie Bodkin never came into his head in the list of damsels with whom Rhoda could be compared. Minnie occupied a place apart, quite removed from any idea of love-making.

Dear Little Rhoda! How fond she was of him!

Altogether Rhoda appeared in a new light, and the new light became her mightily. Yes; Algy was certainly in love with her, he acknowledged to himself. There was no scene, no declaration. It all came to pass very gradually. In Rhoda the sense of this love stole on as subtly as the dawn. Before she had begun to watch the glowing streaks of rose-colour, it was daylight! And then how

warm and golden it grew in her little world! How the birds chirped and fluttered, and the flowers breathed sweet breath, and a thousand diamond drops stood on the humblest blades of grass!

If she had been nine years old, instead of nearly nineteen, she could scarcely have given less heed to the worldly aspects of the situation.

Algernon perhaps more consciously set aside considerations of the future. He was but a boy, however; and he always had a great gift of enjoying the present moment, and sending Janus-headed Care, that looks forward and backward, to the deuce. As yet there was no Lord Seely on his horizon; no London society; no diplomatic career. The latter indeed was but an Ancramism of his mother's, when she spoke of it to Mr. Diamond, and Algy at that time had never entertained the idea of it.

So these two young persons sat side by side, on the bench outside the Welsh cottage, and were as happy as the midsummer days were long.

But long as the midsummer days were, they passed. Then came the time for going back to Whitford. The day before their return home Rhoda received a shock of pain—the first, but not the last, which she ever felt from this love of hers—at these words, said carelessly, but in a low voice, by Algy, as he lounged at her side, watching the sunset:

"Rhoda, darling, you must not say a word to any one about—about you and me, you know."

Not say a word! What had she to say? And to whom? "No, Algy," she answered, in a faint little voice, and began to meditate. The idea had been presented to her for the first time that it was her duty, or Algy's duty, to drag their secret from its home in Fairyland, and subject it to the eyes and tongues of mortals. But being once there, the idea stayed in her mind and would not be banished. Her father—Mrs. Errington—what would they say if they knew that—that she had dared to love Algernon? The future began to look terribly hard to her. The glittering mist which had hidden it was drawn away like a gauze curtain. How could she not have seen it all before? Would any one believe for evermore that she had been such a child, such a fool, so selfishly absorbed in her pleasant day-dreams, as not to calculate the cost of it for one moment until now?

"Oh, Algy!" the poor child broke out, lifting a pale face and startled eyes to his; "if we could only go on for ever as we are! If it would be always summer, and we two could stay in this village, and never go back, or see any of the people again—except father," she added hastily. And a pang of remorse smote her as her conscience told her that the father who loved her so well, and was so good to her, whatever he might be to others, was not at

all necessary to the happiness of her existence henceforward.

"Don't let's be miserable now, at all events," returned Algernon cheerfully. "Look at that purple bar of cloud on the gold! I wonder if I could paint that. I wish I had my colour-box here. The pencil sketches are so dreary after all that colour."

Rhoda had no doubt that Algernon could paint "that," or anything else he applied his brush to. After a while she said, with her heart beating violently, and the colour coming and going in her cheeks: "Don't you think it would be wrong, deceitful—to—if we—not to tell——" Poor Rhoda could not frame her sentence, and was obliged to leave it unfinished.

"Deceitful! Am I generally deceitful, Rhoda? Oh, I say, don't cry; there's a pet! Don't, my darling! I can't bear to see you sorry. But, look here, Rhoda, dear; I'm so young yet, that it wouldn't do to talk about being in love, or anything of that sort. Though I know I shall never change, they would declare I didn't know my own mind, and would make a joke of it"—this shot told with Rhoda, who shrank from ridicule, as a sensitive plant shrinks from the north wind—"and bother my—our lives out. Can't you see old Grimgriffin's great front teeth grinning at us?"

It was in these terms that Algy was wont to

allude to that respectable spinster, Miss Elizabeth Grimshaw.

Rhoda knew that Algy wished and expected her to smile when he said that; and she tried to please him, but the smile would not come. Her lip quivered, and tears began to gather in her eyes again. She would have sobbed outright if she had tried to speak. The more she thought the sadder and more frightened she grew. Ridicule was painful, but that was not the worst. Her father! Mrs. Errington! She lay awake half the night, terrifying herself with imaginations of their wrath.

Algy found an opportunity the next morning to whisper to her a few words. "Don't look so melancholy, Rhoda. They'll wonder at Whitford what's the matter if you go back with such a wan face. And as to what you said about deceit, why we shan't pretend not to love each other! Look here, we must have patience! I shall always love you, darling, and I'm sure to get my own way with my mother in the long run; I always do."

So then there would be obstacles to contend with on Mrs. Errington's part, and Algy acknowledged that there would. Of course she had known before that it must be so. But Algy had declared that he would always love her; that was the one comforting thought to which she clung. Rhoda had grown from a child to a woman since

yesterday. Algy was only older by four-and-twenty hours.

After their return to Whitford came Mr. Filthorpe's letter. Then his mother's application to Lady Seely, brought about by an old acquaintance of Mrs. Errington, who lived in London, and kept up an intermittent correspondence with her. Both these events were talked over in Rhoda's presence. Indeed, the girl filled the part towards Mrs. Errington that the confidant enacts towards the prima donna in an Italian opera. Mrs. Errington was always singing scenas to her, which, so far as Rhoda's share in them went, might just as well have been uttered in the shape of a soliloquy. But the lady was used to her confidant, and liked to have her near, to take her hand in the impressive passages, and to walk up the stage with her during the symphony.

So Rhoda heard Algernon's prospects canvassed. In her heart she longed that he should accept Mr. Filthorpe's offer. It would keep him nearer to her in every sense. She had few opportunities of talking with him alone now—far fewer than at dear Llanryddan; but she was able to say a few words privately to him one afternoon (the very afternoon of Dr. Bodkin's whist-party), and she timidly hinted that if Algy went to Bristol, instead of to London amongst all those great folks, she would not feel that she had lost him so completely.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Algy, whose outlook on life had a good deal changed during the last three months, "how can you talk so? Fancy me on Filthorpe's office stool!"

"London is such a long way off, Algy," murmured the girl plaintively. "And then, amongst all those grand people, lords and ladies, you—you may grow different."

"Upon my word, my dear Rhoda, your appreciation of me is highly flattering! For my part it seems to me more likely that I should grow 'different' in the society of Bristol tradesmen than amongst my own kith and kin—people like myself and my parents in education and manners. I am a gentleman, Rhoda. Lord Seely is not more."

Rhoda shrank back abashed before this magnificent young gentleman. Such a flourish was very unusual in Algernon. But the Ancram strain in him had been asserting itself lately. He was sorry when he saw the poor girl's hurt look and downcast eyes, from which the big tears were silently falling one by one. He took her in his arms, and kissed her pale cheeks, and brought a blush on to them, and an April smile to her lips; and called her his own dear pretty Rhoda, whom he could never, never forget.

"Perhaps it would be best to forget me, Algy," she faltered. And although his loving words, and

flatteries, and caresses, were inexpressibly sweet to her, the pain remained at her heart.

She never again ventured to say a word to him about his plans. She would listen, meekly and admiringly, to his vivid pictures of all the fine things he was to do in the future: pictures in which her figure appeared—like the donor of a great altar-piece, full of splendid saints and golden-crowned angels—kneeling in one corner. And she would sit in silent anguish whilst Mrs. Errington expatiated on her son's prospects; wherein, of late, a "great alliance" played a large part. But she could not rouse herself to elation or enthusiasm. This mattered little to Mrs. Errington, who only required her confidante to stand tolerably still with her back to the audience. But it worried Algernon to see Rhoda's sad, downcast face, irresponsive to any of his bright anticipations. It must be owned that the young fellow's position was not entirely pleasant. Yet his admirable temper and spirits scarcely flagged. He was never cross, except, now and then, just a very little to his mother. And if no one else in the world less deserved his ill-humour, at least no one else in the world was so absolutely certain to forgive him for it!

CHAPTER VII.

Parliament was to meet early in February. It seemed strange that that fact should have any interest for Rhoda Maxfield; nevertheless, so it was. Algernon was to go to London, but it was no use to be there unless Lord Seely, "our cousin," were there also; and my lord our cousin would not be in town before the meeting of parliament. Thus the assembling of the peers and commons of this realm at Westminster was an event on which poor Rhoda's thoughts were bent pretty often in the course of the twenty-four hours.

Mrs. Errington announced to the whole Maxfield family that Algernon was going away from Whitford, and accompanied the announcement with florid descriptions of the glory that awaited her son, in the highest Ancram style of embellishment.

"Well," said old Max, after listening awhile, "and will this lord get Mr. Algernon a place?"

Mrs. Errington could not answer this question very definitely. The future was vague, though splendid. But of course Algy would distinguish himself. That was a matter of course. Perhaps he might begin as Lord Seely's private secretary.

"A sekketary! Humph! I don't think much o' that!" grunted Mr. Maxfield.

"My dear man, you don't understand these things. How should you? Many noblemen's sons would only be too delighted to get the position of private secretary to Lord Seely. A man of such distinction! Hand and glove with the sovereign!"

Maxfield did not altogether dislike to hear his lodger hold forth in this fashion. He had a certain pleasure in contemplating the future grandeur of Mr. Algernon, whose ears he had boxed years ago, on the occasion of finding him enacting the battle of Waterloo, with a couple of schoolfellows, in the warehouse behind the shop, and attacking a Hougoumont of tea-chests and flour-barrels, so briskly, as to threaten their entire demolition.

Maxfield was weaving speculations in connection with the young man, of so wild and fanciful a nature as would have astonished his most familiar friends, could they have peeped into the brain inside his grizzled old head.

But this rose-coloured condition of things did not last.

One afternoon, Mrs. Errington looked into his little sitting-room, on her way upstairs, and finding him with an account-book, in which he was, not making, but reading entries, she stepped in, and began to chat; if any speech so laboriously condescending as hers to Mr. Maxfield may be thus designated. Her theme, of course, was her son, and her son's prospects.

"That'll be all very fine for Mr. Algernon, to be sure," said old Max, slowly, after some time, "but—it'll cost money."

"Not so much as you think for. Low persons who feel themselves in a false position, no doubt find it necessary to make a show. But a real gentleman can afford to be simple."

"But I take it he'll have to afford other things besides being simple! He'll have to afford clothes, and lodging, and maybe food. You aren't rich."

Mrs. Errington admitted the fact.

"Algernon ought to find a wife with a bit o' money," said the old man, looking straight and hard into the lady's eyes. Those round orbs sustained the gaze as unflinchingly as if they had been made of blue china.

"It is not at all a bad idea," Mrs. Errington said, graciously.

"But then he wouldn't just take the first ugly woman as had a fort'n."

"Oh dear no!"

"No; nor yet an old 'un."

"Good gracious, man! of course not!"

"Young, pretty, good, and a bit o' money. That's about his mark, eh?"

Mrs. Errington shook her head pathetically "She ought to have birth, too," she said. "But the woman takes her husband's rank; unless," she added, correcting herself, and with much emphasis, "unless she happens to be the better born of the two."

"Oh, she does, eh? The woman takes her husband's rank? Ah! well, that's script'ral. I have never troubled my head about these vain worldly distinctions; but that is script'ral."

Mrs. Errington was not there to discuss her landlord's opinions or to listen to them; but he served as well as another to be the recipient of her talk about Algernon, which accordingly she resumed, and indulged in ever-higher flights of boasting. Her mendacity, like George Wither's muse,

As it made wing, so it made power.

"The fact is, there is more than one young lady on whom my connections in London have cast their eye for Algy. Miss Pickleham, only daughter of the great drysalter, who is such an eminent member of Parliament; Blanche Fitzsnowdon, Judge Whitelamb's lovely niece; one of Major-General Indigo's charming girls, all of them

perfect specimens of the Eastern style of beauty —their mother was an Indian princess, and enormously wealthy. But I am in no hurry for my boy to bind himself in an engagement: it hampers a young man's career."

"Career!" broke out old Max, who had listened to all this, and much more, with an increasingly dismayed and lowering expression of countenance. "Why, what's his career to be? He's been brought up to do nothing! It 'ud be his only chance to get hold of a wife with a bit o' money. Then he might act the gentleman at his ease; and maybe his fine friends 'ud help him when they found he didn't want it. But as for career—it's my opinion as he'll never earn his salt!"

And with that the old man marched across the passage into the shop, taking no further notice of his lodger; and she heard him slam the little half-door, giving access to the store-house, with such force as to set the jingling bell on it tinkling for full five minutes.

Mrs. Errington was so surprised by this sally, that she stood staring after him for some time before she was able to collect herself sufficiently to walk majestically upstairs.

"Maxfield's temper becomes more and more extraordinary," she said to her son, with an air of great solemnity. "The man really forgets himself

altogether. Do you suppose that he drinks, Algy? or is he, do you think, a little touched?" She put her finger to her forehead. "Really I should not wonder. There has been a great deal of preaching and screeching lately, since this Powell came; and, you know, they do say that these Ranters and Methodists sometimes go raving mad at their field-meetings and love-feasts. You need not laugh, my dear boy; I have often heard your father say that nothing was more contagious than that sort of hysterical excitement. And your father was a physician; and certainly knew his profession if he didn't know the world, poor man!"

"Was old Max hysterical, ma'am?" asked Algernon, his whole face lighted up with mischievous amusement. And the notion so tickled him, that he burst out laughing at intervals, as it recurred to him, all the rest of the day.

Betty Grimshaw, and Sarah, the servant-maid, and James, helping his father to serve in the shop, and the customers who came to buy, all suffered from the unusual exacerbation of Maxfield's temper for some time after that conversation of his with Mrs. Errington.

It increased, also, the resentful feeling which had been growing in his mind towards David Powell. The young man's tone of rebuke, in speaking of Rhoda's associating with the Erringtons, had taken Maxfield by surprise at the time;

and he had not, he afterwards thought, been sufficiently trenchant in his manner of putting down the presumptuous reprover. He blew up his wrath until it burned hot within him; and, the more so, inasmuch as he could give no vent to it in direct terms. To question and admonish was the acknowledged duty of a Methodist preacher. Conference made no exceptions in favour even of so select a vessel as Jonathan Maxfield. But Maxfield thought, nevertheless, that Powell ought to have had modesty and discernment to make the exception himself.

No inquisitor—no priest, sitting like a mysterious Eastern idol in the inviolate shrine of the confessional—ever exercised a more tremendous power over the human conscience than was laid in the hands of the Methodist preacher or leader according to Wesley's original conception of his functions. But besides the essential difference between the Romish and Methodist systems that the latter could bring no physical force to bear on the refractory, there was this important point to be noted: namely, that the inquisitor might be subjected to inquisition by his flock. The priest might be made to come forth from the confessional-box, and answer to a pressing catechism before all the congregation. In the band-meetings and select societies each individual bound himself to answer the most searching questions "concerning his state,

sins, and temptations." It was a mutual inquisition, to which, of course, those who took part in it voluntarily submitted themselves.

But the spiritual power wielded by the chiefs was very great, as their own subordination to the conference was very complete. Its pernicious effects were, however, greatly kept in check by the system of itinerancy, which required the preachers to move frequently from place to place.

There are few human virtues or weaknesses to which, on one side or the other, Methodism in its primitive manifestations did not appeal. Benevolence, self-sacrifice, fervent piety, temperance, charity, were all called into play by its teachings. But so also were spiritual pride, narrow-mindedness, fanaticism, gloom, and pharisaical self-righteousness. Only to the slothful, and such as loved their ease above all things, early Methodism had no seductions to offer.

Jonathan Maxfield's father and grandfather had been disciples of John Wesley. The grandfather was born in 1710, seven years before Wesley, and had been among the great preacher's earliest adherents in Bristol.

Traditions of John Wesley's sayings and doings were cherished and handed down in the family. They claimed kindred with Thomas Maxfield, Wesley's first preacher, and conveniently forgot or ignored—as greater families have done—those

parts of their kinsman's career which ran counter to the present course of their creed and conduct. For Thomas Maxfield seceded from Wesley, but the grandfather and father of Jonathan continued true to Methodism all their lives. They married within the "society" (as was strictly enjoined at the first conference), and assisted the spread of its tenets throughout their part of the West of England.

In the third generation, however, the original fire of Methodism had nearly burnt itself out, and a few charred sticks remained to attest the brightness that had been. Never, perhaps, in the case of the Maxfields—a cramp-natured, harsh breed—had the fire become a hearth-glow to warm their homes with. It had rather been like the crackling of thorns under a pot. The dryest and sharpest will flare for a while.

Old Max, nevertheless, looked upon himself as an exemplary Methodist. He made no mental analyses of himself or of his neighbours. He merely took cognisance of facts as they appeared to him through the distorting medium of his prejudices, temper, ignorance, and the habits of a lifetime. When he did or said disagreeable things, he prided himself on doing his duty. And his self-approval was never troubled by the reflection that he did not altogether dislike a little bitter flavour in his daily life, as some persons prefer their wine rough.

But to do and say disagreeable things because it is your duty is a very different matter from accepting, or listening to, disagreeable things, because it is somebody else's duty to do and say them! It was not to be expected that Jonathan Maxfield should meekly endure rebuke from a young man like David Powell.

And now crept in the exasperating suspicion that the young man might have been right in his warning! Maxfield watched his daughter with more anxiety than he had ever felt about her in his life, looking to see symptoms of dejection at Algernon's approaching departure. He did not know that she had been aware of it before it was announced to himself.

One day her father said to her abruptly, "Rhoda, you're looking very pale and out o' sorts. Your eyes are heavy" (they were swollen with crying), "and your face is the colour of a turnip. I think I shall send you off to Duckwell for a bit of a change."

Duckwell Farm was owned by Seth, Maxfield's eldest son.

"I don't want a change, indeed, father," said the girl, looking up quickly and eagerly. "I had a headache this morning, but it is quite gone now. That's what made me look so pale."

From that time forward she exerted herself to appear cheerful, and to shake off the dull pain

at the heart which weighed her down, until her father began to persuade himself that he had been mistaken, and over-anxious. She always declared herself to be quite well and free from care. "And I know she would not tell me a lie," thought the old man.

Alas, she had learned to lie in her words and her manner. She had, for the first time in her life, a motive for concealment, and she used the natural armour of the weak—duplicity.

Rhoda had been "good" hitherto, because her nature was gentle, and her impulses affectionate. She had no strong religious fervour, but she lived blamelessly, and prayed reverently, and was docile and humble-minded. She had never professed to have attained that sudden and complete regeneration of spirit which is the prime glory of Methodism. But then many good persons lived and died without attaining "assurance." Whenever Rhoda thought on the subject—which, to say the truth, was not often, for her nature, though sweet and pure, was not capable of much spiritual aspiration, and was altogether incapable of fervent self-searching and fiery enthusiasm—she hoped with simple faith that she should be saved if she did nothing wicked.

Her father and David Powell would have pointed out to her, that her "doing," or leaving undone, could have no influence on the matter.

But their words bore small fruit in her mind. Her father's religious teaching had the dryness of an accustomed formality to her ears. It had been poured into them before she had sense to comprehend it, and had grown to be nearly meaningless, like the everyday salutation we exchange a hundred times, without expecting or thinking of the answer.

David Powell was certainly neither dry nor formal, but he frightened her. She shut her understanding against the disturbing influence of his words, as she would have pressed her fingers into her pretty ears to keep out the thunder. And then her dream of love had come and filled her life.

In most of us it wonderfully alters the focus of the mind's eye with its glamour, that dream. To Rhoda it seemed the one thing beautiful and desirable. And—to say all the truth—the pain of mind which she felt, other than that connected with her lover's going away, and which she attributed to remorse for the little deceptions and concealments she practised, was occasioned almost entirely by the latent dread, lest the time should come when she should sit lonely, looking at the cold ashes of Algy's burnt-out love. For she did mistrust his constancy, although no power would have forced the confession from her. This blind, obstinate clinging to the beloved was, perhaps, the only form in which self-esteem ever

strongly manifested itself in that soft, timid nature.

There was one person who watched Rhoda more understandingly than her father did, and who had more serious apprehensions on her account. David Powell knew, as did nearly all Whitford by this time, that young Errington was going away; and he clearly saw that the change in Rhoda was connected with that departure. He marked her pallor, her absence of mind, her fits of silence, broken by forced bursts of assumed cheerfulness. Her feigning did not deceive him.

Albeit of almost equally narrow education with Jonathan Maxfield, Powell had gained, in his frequent changes of place and contact with many strange people, a wider knowledge of the world than the Whitford tradesman possessed. He perceived how unlikely it was, that people like the Erringtons should seriously contemplate allying themselves by marriage with "old Max;" but that was not the worst. To the preacher's mind, the girl's position was, in the highest degree, perilous; for he conceived that what would be accounted by the world the happiest possible solution to such a love as Rhoda's, would involve nothing less than the putting in jeopardy her eternal welfare. He could not look forward with any hope to a union between Rhoda and such a one as Algernon Errington.

"The son is a shallow-hearted, fickle youth, with the vanity of a boy and the selfishness of a man; the mother, a mere worldling, living in decent godlessness."

Such was David Powell's judgment. He reflected long and earnestly. What was his calling—his business in life? To save souls. He had no concern with anything else. He must seek out and help, not only those who needed him, but those who most needed him.

All conventional rules of conduct, all restraining considerations of a merely social or worldly kind, were as threads of gossamer to this man whensoever they opposed the higher commands which he believed to have been laid upon him.

Jonathan Maxfield was falling away from godliness. He, too evidently, was willing to give up his daughter into the tents of the heathen. The pomps and vanities of this wicked world had taken hold of the old man. Satan had ensnared and bribed him with the bait of worldly ambition. From Jonathan there was no real help to be expected.

In the little garret-chamber, where he lodged in the house of a widow—one of the most devout of the Methodist congregation—the preacher rose from his knees one midnight, and took from his breast the little, worn pocket-Bible, which he always carried. A bright cold moon shone in at

the uncurtained window, but its beams did not suffice to enable him to read the small print of his Bible. He had no candle; but he struck a light with a match, and, by its brief flare, read these words, on which his finger had fallen as he opened the book:

"How hast thou counselled him that hath no wisdom? And how hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is?

"To whom hast thou uttered words? and whose spirit came from thee?"

He had drawn a lot, and this was the answer. The leading was clear. He would speak openly with Rhoda himself. He would pray and wrestle; he would argue and exhort. He would awaken her spirit, lulled to sleep by the sweet voice of the tempter.

It would truly be little less than a miracle, should he succeed by the mere force of his earnest eloquence, in persuading a young girl like Rhoda to renounce her first love.

But, then, David Powell believed in miracles.

CHAPTER VIII.

All that she had heard of the Methodist preacher had taken strong hold of Minnie Bodkin's imagination. Mr. Diamond's description of him especially delighted her. It was in piquant contrast with her previous notions about Methodists, who were associated in her mind with ludicrous images. This man must be something entirely different—picturesque and interesting.

But there was a deeper feeling in her mind than the mere curiosity to see a remarkable person. Minnie was not happy; and her unhappiness was not solely due to the fact of her bodily infirmities. She often felt a yearning for a higher spiritual support and comfort than she had ever derived from her father's teachings. She passed in review the congregation of the parish church, most of whom were known to her, and she asked herself what good result in their lives or characters was produced by their weekly church-going. Was Mrs. Errington more truthful; Miss Chubb less vain;

Mr. Warlock less gloomy; her father (for Minnie, in the pride of her keen intellect, spared no one) less arrogant and overbearing; she herself more patient, gentle, hopeful, and happy, than if the old bell of St. Chad's were silent, and the worm-eaten old doors shut, and the dusty old pulpit voiceless, for evermore? Yet there were said to be people on whom religion had a vital influence. She wished she could know such. She could judge, she thought, by seeing and conversing with them, whether or not there were any reality in their professions. Minnie seldom doubted the sufficiency of her own acumen and penetration.

No; she was not happy. And might it not be that this Methodist man had the secret of peace of mind? Was there in truth a physician who could minister to a suffering spirit? She thought of Powell with the feeling half of shame, half of credulity, with which an invalid hankers after a quack medicine.

Minnie had been taught to look upon Dissenters in general as quacks, and upon Methodists as arch-quacks. Dr. Bodkin professed himself a staunch Churchman and a hater of "cant." He considered that Protestantism, and the right of private judgment, had justly reached their extreme limits in the Church of England as by law established. He detested enthusiasm as a dangerous and disturbing element in human affairs, and he viewed with

especial indignation the pretensions of unlearned persons to preach and proselytise. Although he had no leaning to Romanism, he would rather have admitted a Jesuit into his house than a Methodist. Indeed, he sometimes defined the latter to be the Jesuit of dissent—only, as he would take care to point out, a Jesuit without learning, culture, or authority.

"I can listen to a gentleman, although I may not agree with him," the Doctor would say (albeit, in truth, he had no great gift of listening to anyone who opposed his opinions), "but am I to be hectored and lectured by the cobbler and the tinker?"

Minnie had no taste for being hectored or lectured; but it seemed to her that what the cobbler and tinker said, was more important than the fact that it was they who said it. She thought, and pondered, and wondered about the Methodist preacher, and about her chance of ever seeing or hearing more of him, until a thought darted into her mind like an arrow. Little Rhoda! She was a Methodist born and bred, and knew this preacher, and——Minnie would send for little Rhoda.

When she announced this resolution to her mother, Mrs. Bodkin found several difficulties in the way of its fulfilment.

"What do you want with her, Minnie?"

"I want to see her. Mrs. Errington talks

so much of her. I remember her coming here with a message once, when she was a child. I recollect only a little fair face and shy eyes, under a coal-scuttle straw bonnet. Don't you, mamma? And I want to talk to her about several things," added Minnie, with resolute truthfulness.

"Oh, dear me! What will your papa say?"

"I don't see how papa can object to my asking this nice little thing to come to me for an afternoon, when he doesn't mind your boring yourself to death with Goody Barton, whose snuff-taking would try the nerves of a rhinoceros, nor forbid my inviting the little Jobsons, who are unpleasant to look upon, and stupid beyond the wildest flights of imagination. He lets me have any one I like."

"Yes; but you teach the little Jobsons the alphabet, my dear. And that is a charitable work."

"And Rhoda will amuse me, and I'm sure that is a charitable work!"

Minnie would get her own way, of course. She always did.

That same evening Minnie said to her father, with her frank, bright smile, "Papa, may I not ask Rhoda Maxfield to take tea with me some afternoon?"

"Rhoda what?"

"Little Maxfield, the grocer's daughter, papa," said Minnie, boldly.

Mrs. Bodkin bent nervously over her knitting.

"What on earth for? Why do you want to associate with such folks? Have you not plenty of friends without—— ?"

"No, papa. But I don't ask her because I'm in want of friends."

"Oh, Minnie," said Mrs. Bodkin in the quick, low tones she habitually spoke in, "I'm sure nobody has more friends than you have! Everybody is so glad to come to you, always."

"You're my friend, mamma. And papa is my friend. Never mind the rest. I want to have little Maxfield to tea." Minnie laughed at herself, the moment after she had said the words, in the tone of a spoiled child.

Dr. Bodkin crossed and uncrossed his legs, kicked a footstool out of the way, and then got up and stood before the fire.

"If you want amusement, isn't there Miss Chubb or the McDougalls, or—or plenty more?" said he, shooting out his upper lip, and frowning uneasily.

"Now, papa, can you say in conscience that you find Miss Chubb and the McDougalls perennially amusing?" Then, with a sudden change of tone, "Besides, you know, the other people are playing their parts in life, and strutting about hither and

thither on the stage, and they find it all more or less interesting. But I—I am like a child at a peep-show. I can but look on, and I sometimes long for a change in the scene and the puppets!"

The doctor began to poke the fire violently. "Laura," said he, addressing his wife, "that last tea you got is good for nothing. They brought me a cup just now in the study that was absolutely undrinkable. Is it Smith's tea? Well, try Maxfield's. You can have some ordered when the message is sent for the girl to come here."

In this way the doctor gave his permission.

The next day Minnie despatched her maid, Jane, with the following note to Mr. Maxfield:—

"Will Mr. Maxfield allow his daughter Rhoda to spend the afternoon with Miss Bodkin? Miss Bodkin is an invalid, and cannot often leave her room, and it would give her great pleasure to see Rhoda. The maid shall wait and accompany Rhoda if Mr. Maxfield permits, and Miss Bodkin undertakes to have her sent safely home again in the evening."

Old Max was scarcely more surprised than gratified on reading this invitation. He stood behind his counter holding the pink perfumed note between his floury finger and thumb, and turning over the contents of it in his mind, whilst his son James served the maid with some tea.

Miss Minnie was a much-looked-up-to personage in Whitford. And here was Miss Minnie inviting Rhoda just as though she had been a lady, and sending her own maid for her. This would be Algy's doing, the old man decided. Algy had more sense than his mother. Algy knew that Rhoda was fit to go anywhere, and could hold her own with the best. The young fellow was very thick with Dr. Bodkin's family, and had, no doubt, talked to Miss Minnie about Rhoda. All sorts of ideas thronged into old Max's head, which, nevertheless, looked as obstinately idealess a one as could well be imagined, as he stood conning the pink note, with his grey eyebrows knotted together, and his heavy under-lip pursed up. Perhaps not the feeblest element in his feeling of exultation was the sense of triumph over David Powell. Powell might approve or disapprove, but anyway, he would see that he was wrong in supposing the Erringtons did not think Rhoda good enough for them! If they introduced her about among their friends, that meant a good deal, eh, brother David? And that the invitation came by means of the Erringtons, Maxfield felt more and more convinced, the more he thought of it. So many years had passed, and Miss Minnie had taken no notice of Rhoda. Why should she now? Maxfield was at no loss to find the answer. Maybe old Mrs. Errington had talked for talk's sake more

than she meant. Maybe her boasting was in order to drive a hard bargain, when Algy should come forward and offer to make Rhoda a lady.

The Erringtons' friends were going little by little to make acquaintance with Rhoda, in view of the promotion that awaited her. Well, Rhoda could stand the test. Rhoda was quite different from the likes of him.

He called his sister-in-law out of the kitchen, and in a few hurried words told her of the invitation, and bade her tell Rhoda to get ready without delay. He cut Betty Grimshaw short in her exclamations and inquiries. "I've no time to talk to you now," he said. "The maid is waiting. Bid Rhoda clothe herself in her best garments."

"What! her Sunday frock, Jonathan?" exclaimed Betty in shrill surprise.

"'Sh! woman!" answered Maxfield, and gripped her wrist fiercely. He did not want that family detail to come to the ears of Miss Bodkin's maid.

Rhoda was completely bewildered by the invitation, and by the breathless haste with which Betty announced it to her, and hurried her preparations. "But I don't want to go!" murmured Rhoda plaintively. At the same time she suffered her clothes to be huddled on to her in Aunt Betty's rough fashion.

"Ah! tell that to your parent, my dear. I

have the mark of his fingers on my wrist at this moment; he was in such a taking, and so —so uncumboundable." This latter was a word of Betty's own invention, and she frequently employed it with an air of great relish.

The idea of going amongst strangers was more terrible to Rhoda than can easily be conceived by those who have never lived so secluded a life as hers had been. Had she been able to say a word to Algernon, she thought she should have derived a little comfort and support from him. But he and his mother were both from home.

All the way from her own house to Dr. Bodkin's, Rhoda uttered no word, except to ask Jane timidly if she were sure Miss Minnie would be alone—quite alone?

The gloomy court-yard, and the stone entrance hall of the house struck her with awe. The old man-servant who opened the door seemed to look severely on her. She followed Jane with a beating heart up the wide staircase, whose thick carpet muffled her footsteps mysteriously, and then through a drawing-room full of furniture all covered with grey holland. There was the glitter of gilt picture-frames on the walls, and the shining of a great mirror, and of a large, dark, polished pianoforte at one end of the room. And there was a mingled smell of flowers and cedar-wood, and altogether the impression made upon Rhoda's senses, as she passed

through the apartment, was one of perfume, and silence, and vague splendour. She had no time, even if she had had self-possession, to examine the details of what seemed to her so grand, for she was led across a passage and into a room opposite to the drawing-room, and found herself in Miss Bodkin's presence.

The room was Minnie's bedroom, but it did not look like a sleeping chamber, Rhoda thought. To be sure a little white-curtained bed stood in one corner, but all the toilet apparatus was hidden by a curtain which hung across a recess, and there were bookshelves full of books, and flowers on a stand, and a writing-table. On one side of the fireplace, in which a bright fire blazed, there was a curious sort of long chair, and in it, dressed in a loose crimson robe of soft woollen stuff, reclined Minnie Bodkin.

Rhoda was, as has been said, extremely sensitive to beauty, and Minnie's whole aspect struck her with admiration. The picturesque rich-coloured robe, the delicate white hands relieved upon it, the graceful languor of Minnie's attitude, and the air of refinement in the young lady and her surroundings, were all intensely appreciated by poor little Rhoda, who stood dumb and blushing before her hostess.

Minnie, on her part, was a good deal taken by surprise. She welcomed Rhoda with her sweetest

smile, and thanked her for coming, and made her sit down by the fire opposite to herself; and when they were alone together, she talked on for some time with a sort of careless good-nature, which, little by little, succeeded in setting Rhoda somewhat at her ease. But careless as Minnie's manner was, she was scrutinising the other girl's looks and ways very keenly.

"She is absolutely lovely!" thought Minnie, "And so graceful, and—and—lady-like! Yes; positively that is the word. She is as shy as a fawn, but no more awkward than one. It is not what I expected."

Perhaps Minnie could scarcely have said what it was that she had expected. Probably a quiet, pretty-looking, well-behaved young person, like her maid Jane. Rhoda was something very different, and the young lady was charmed with her new *protégée*. Only she was obliged to admit, before the afternoon was over, that she had failed in the main object for which she had invited Rhoda to visit her. There was no clear and vivid account of Powell, his teaching, or his preaching, to be got from Rhoda.

Rhoda could not remember exactly what Mr. Powell said. Rhoda could not say what it was which made all the people cry and grow so excited at his preaching. Rhoda cried herself sometimes, but that was when he talked very pitifully about

poor people, and little children, and things like that. Sometimes, too, she felt frightened at his preaching, but she supposed she was frightened because she had not got assurance. Many of the congregation had assurance. Yes; oh yes, the people said Mr. Powell was a wonderful man, and the most awakening preacher who had been in Whitford for fifty years.

Minnie looked at the simple, serious face, and marked the childlike demureness of manner with which Rhoda declared Mr. Powell to be "an awakening preacher." "I don't think he has awakened you to any very startling extent!" thought Minnie. "This girl seems to have received no strong influence from him."

That was in a great measure the fact; but also, Rhoda was held back from speaking freely, by the conviction that her Methodist phraseology would sound strange, and perhaps absurd, in the young lady's ears. Moreover, it did not help to put her at her ease, that she felt sundry uneasy pricks of conscience for not "bearing testimony" with more fervour. She knew that David Powell would have had her improve the occasion to the uttermost. But how could she run the risk of being disagreeable to Miss Minnie, who was so kind to her?

That was the form in which Rhoda mentally put the case. The truth was, hers was not one of those natures to which the invisible ever becomes

more real and important than the visible. It was incomparably more necessary to her happiness to be in agreeable and smooth relations with the people around her, than to feel herself in higher spiritual communion with unseen powers.

When Minnie at length reluctantly desisted from questioning her on the subject of Powell, and her chapel-going, and her religious feelings, she was surprised to find how the girl's frigid, constrained manner thawed, and how her tongue was loosened.

She chatted freely enough about her visit to Llanryddan in the summer, and about Duckwell Farm, where her half-brother Seth lived, and, above all, about Mrs. Errington. Mrs. Errington had been so good to her, and had taught her, and talked to her; and did Miss Minnie know what a change it was for a lady like Mrs. Errington to live in such a poor place as theirs? For, although she had the best rooms, of course it was very poor, compared with the castle she was brought up in. About Algernon she said very little; but it slipped out that she was in the habit of being present when Mr. Diamond came to read with the young gentleman; and then Miss Minnie was very much interested in hearing what Mr. Diamond said to his pupil, and how Rhoda liked Mr. Diamond, and what she thought of him. And when it appeared that Rhoda had thought very

little about him at all, but considered him a very clever, learned gentleman—perhaps a little stiff and grave, but not at all unkind—Miss Minnie smiled to herself and said, "He is a little stiff and grave, Rhoda. Not the kind of person to attract one very much, eh!"

And then tea was brought, and Rhoda sipped hers out of a delicate porcelain cup, like those which Mrs. Errington had in her corner cupboard. And there were some delicious cakes, which Rhoda was quite natural enough to own she liked very much. And then Mrs. Bodkin came in, and sat down beside her daughter; and finally, at Minnie's request, she took Rhoda into the drawing-room, and played to her on the grand piano.

"Rhoda likes music, she says, mamma. But she has never heard a good instrument. Do play her a bit of Mozart!"

"I am no great performer, my dear," said Mrs. Bodkin, opening the piano; "but I keep up my playing on my daughter's account. She is not strong enough to play for herself."

Minnie had her chair wheeled into the drawing-room, in order, as she whispered to her mother, to enjoy Rhoda's face when she should hear the music.

Rhoda sat by and listened, in a trance of delight, while Mrs. Bodkin made the keys of the instrument delicately sound a minuet of Mozart,

and then give forth more volume of tone in "The Heavens are telling." This was different, indeed, from the tinkling old harpsichord at home! The music transported her. When it ceased she was breathing quickly, and her eyes were full of tears. "Oh, how beautiful!" she faltered out.

"Why, child, you are a capital audience!" said Mrs. Bodkin, smiling kindly.

Then it was time to go home. She was made to promise that she would come again and see Minnie whenever her father would let her. She left Dr. Bodkin's house in a very different frame of mind from that in which she had entered it. Yet she was as silent on her way home as she had been in the afternoon.

How happy gentlefolks must be, who always can have music, and flowers, and talk in such soft voices, and are so polite in their manners, and so dainty in their persons! She could not help contrasting the coarse, rough ways at home with the smoothness and softness of the life she had had a glimpse of at Dr. Bodkin's. She tried to hold fast in her memory the pleasant sights and sounds of the day.

In this mood, half-enjoying, half-regretful, she arrived at her father's house to find the little parlour full of people—besides her own family and Powell there were two or three neighbours who

joined in the exercises—and a prayer-meeting just culminating in a long-drawn hymn, bawled out with more zeal than sweetness by the little assembly.

CHAPTER IX.

Rhoda stood with her hand on the parlour-door for a minute or so. Little Sarah, the servant-maid, who had admitted her into the house, and had left the parlour in order to do so—for all the Maxfield household was held bound to join in these weekly prayer-meetings—told her that the hymn would be over directly. Rhoda felt shy of entering into the midst of the people assembled, and of encountering the questions and expressions of surprise which her unprecedented absence from the evening's devotions would certainly occasion.

Presently the singing ceased. Rhoda ran as quickly and noiselessly as she could along the passage, and half-way up the stairs. From her post there she heard the neighbours go away, and the street-door close heavily behind them. Now she might venture to slip down. Everyone was gone. The house was quite still. She ran into the parlour, and found herself face to face with David Powell.

Her Aunt Betty was piling the hymn-books in their place on the little table where they stood. There was no one else in the room.

"Where's father?" asked Rhoda, hastily. Then she recollected herself, and bade Mr. Powell "Good evening." He returned her salutation with his usual gentleness, but with more than his usual gravity.

"Oh!" exclaimed Betty Grimshaw, looking round from the books. "It's you, is it, Rhoda? Your father is gone with Mr. Gladwish to his house for a bit. They have some business together. He'll be back by supper."

It very seldom happened that Maxfield left his house after dark. Still such a thing had occurred once or twice. Mr. Gladwish, the shoemaker, was a steward of the Methodist society, and Maxfield not unfrequently had occasion to confer with him. Their business this evening was not so pressing but that it might have been deferred. But Maxwell did not choose to give Powell an opportunity of private conversation with himself at that time; he wanted to see his way clearer before he took the decided step of openly putting himself into opposition with the practice of his brethren, and the advice of the preacher; and he knew Powell well enough to be sure that evasions would not avail with him. Therefore he had gone out as soon as the prayers were at an end.

"I must see to the supper," said Betty, and bustled off without another word. Nothing would have kept her in Mr. Powell's society but the masterful influence of her brother-in-law. She escaped to her haven of refuge, the kitchen, where the moral atmosphere was not too rarefied for the comfortable breathing of ordinary folks.

David Powell and Rhoda were left alone together. Rhoda made a little half-timid, half-impatient movement of her shoulders. She wished Powell gone, more heartily than she had ever done before in the course of her acquaintance with him.

Powell stood, with his hands clasped and his eyes cast down, in deep meditation.

At length Rhoda took courage to murmur a word or two about going to take her cloak off. Aunt Betty would be back presently. If Mr. Powell didn't mind for a minute or two—— She was gliding towards the door, when his voice stopped her.

"Tarry a little, Rhoda," said the preacher, looking up at her with his lustrous, earnest eyes. "I have something on my soul to say to you."

Rhoda's eyes fell before his, as they habitually did now. She felt as though he could read her heart; and she had something to hide in it. She did not seat herself, but stood, with one hand on the wooden mantelshelf, looking into the fire. In

her other hand she held her straw bonnet by its violet ribbon, and her waving brown hair shone in the firelight.

"What is it, Mr. Powell?" she asked.

She spoke sharply, and her tones smote painfully on her hearer. He did not understand that the sharpness in it was born of fear.

"Rhoda," he began, "my spirit has been much exercised on your behalf."

He paused; but she did not speak, only bent her head a little lower, as she stood leaning in the same attitude.

"Rhoda, I fear your soul is unawakened. You are sweet and gentle, as a dove or a lamb is gentle; but you have not the root of the matter as a Christian hath it. The fabric is built on sand. Fair as it is, a breath may overthrow it. There is but one sure foundation whereon to lay our lives, and yours is not set upon it."

"I—I—try to be good," stammered Rhoda, in whom the consciousness of much truth in what Powell was saying, struggled with something like indignation at being thus reproved, with the sense of a painful shock from this jarring discord coming to close the harmonious impressions of her pleasant day, and with an inarticulate dread of what was yet in store for her. "I say my prayers, and—and I don't think I'm so very wicked, Mr. Powell. No one else thinks I am, but you."

"Oh, Rhoda! Oh, my child!" His voice grew tender as sad music, and, as he went on speaking, all trace of diffidence and hesitation fell away, and only the sincere purpose of the man shone in him clear as sunlight. "My heart yearns with compassion over you. Are those the words of a believing and repentant sinner? You 'try!' You 'say your prayers!' You are 'not so wicked!' Rhoda, behold, I have an urgent message for you, which you must hear!"

She started and looked round at him. He read her thought. "No earthly message, Rhoda, and from no earthly being. Ah, child, the eager look dies out of your eyes! Rhoda, do you ever think how much God loveth us? How much he loveth you, poor perishing little bird, fluttering blindly in the outer darkness of the world!—that darkness which comprehended not the light from the beginning."

Rhoda's tears were now dropping fast. Her lip trembled as she repeated once more, "I try—I do try to be good," with an almost peevish emphasis.

"Nay, Rhoda, I must speak. In His hand all instruments are alike good and serviceable. He has chosen me, even me, to call you to Him. However much you may despise the Messenger, the message is sure, and of unspeakable comfort."

"Oh, Mr. Powell, I don't despise you. Indeed I don't! I know you mean—I know you are good. But I don't think there's any such great harm in going to see a—a young lady who is too ill to go out. I'm sure she is a very good young lady. I'm sure I do try to be good."

That was the sum of Rhoda's eloquence. She held fast by those few words in a helpless way, which was at once piteous and irritating.

"Are you speaking in sincerity from the very bottom of your heart?" asked Powell, with the invincible, patient gentleness which is born of a strong will. "No, Rhoda; you know you are not. There is harm in following our own inclinations, rather than the voice of the spirit within us. There is harm in clinging to works—to anything we can do. There is harm in neglecting the service of our Master to pleasure any human being."

"I did forget that it was prayer-meeting night," admitted Rhoda, more humbly than before. Her natural sweetness of temper was regaining the ascendant, in proportion as her dread of what might be the subject of Powell's reproving admonition decreased. She could bear to be told that it was wrong to visit Minnie Bodkin. She should not like to be told so, and she should refuse to believe it, but she could bear it; and she began to believe that this visit was held to be the head and front of her offending. Powell's next words undeceived her,

and startled her back into a paroxysm of mistrust and agitation.

"But it is not of your absence from prayer to-night that I would speak now. You are entangling yourself in a snare. You are laying up stores of sorrow for yourself and others. You are listening to the sweet voice of temptation, and giving your conscience into the hand of the ungodly to ruin and deface!" He made a little gesture towards the room overhead with his hand, as he said that Rhoda was giving her conscience into the hands of the ungodly.

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Powell. And I—I don't think it's charitable to speak so of a person—of persons that you know nothing of."

She was entirely taken off her guard. Her head felt as if it were whirling round, and the words she uttered seemed to come out of her mouth without her will. Between fear and anger she trembled like a leaf in the wind. She would have fled out of the room, but her strength failed her. Her heart was beating so fast that she could scarcely breathe. Her distress pained Powell to the heart; pained him so much, as to dismay him with a vivid glimpse of the temptation that continually lay in wait for him, to spare her, and soothe her, and cease from his painful probing of her conscience. "Oh, there is a bone of the old

man in me yet!" he thought remorsefully. "Lord, Lord, strengthen me, or I fall!"

"How hast thou counselled him that hath no wisdom? And how hast thou plentifully declared the thing as it is?"

The remembrance of the lot he had drawn came into his mind, as an answer to his mental prayer. It was natural that the words should recur to him vividly at that moment, but he accepted their recurrence as an undoubted inspiration from Heaven. The belief in such direct and immediate communications was a vital part of his faith; and to have destroyed it would, in great part, have paralysed the impetuous energy, and quenched the burning enthusiasm, which carried away his hearers, and communicated something of his own exaltation to the most torpid spirits.

He murmured a few words of fervent thanksgiving for the clear leading which had been vouchsafed to him, and without an instant's hesitation addressed the tearful, trembling girl beside him. "Listen to me, Rhoda. If it be good for your soul's sake that I lay bare my heart before you, and suffer sore in the doing of it, shall I shrink? God forbid! By His help I will plentifully declare the thing as it is. I have watched you, and your feelings have not been hid from me. No; nor your fears, and sorrows, and hopes, and struggles. I have read them all so plainly, that I must believe

the Lord has given me a special insight in your case, that I may call you unto Him with power. You are suffering, Rhoda, and sorry; but you have not thrown your burden upon the Lord. You have set up His creature as an idol in your soul, and have bowed down and worshipped it. And you fancy, poor unwary lamb, that such love as yours was never before felt by mortal, and that never did mortal so entirely deserve it! And you say in your heart, 'Lo, this man talks of what he knows not! It is easy for him!' Well—I tell you, Rhoda, that I too have a heart for human love. I have eyes to see what is fair and lovely; and fancies and desires, and passions. I love—there is a maiden whom I love above all God's creatures. But, by His grace, I have overcome that love, in so far as it perilled the higher love and the higher duty, which I owe to my father in Heaven. I have wrestled sore, God knoweth. And He hath helped me, as He always will help those who rely, not on their own strength, but on His!"

Rhoda was hurried out of herself, carried away by the rush of his eloquence, in whose powerful spell the mere words bore but a small part. Eyes, voice, and gesture expressed the most absolute, self-forgetting enthusiasm. The contagion of his burning sincerity drew a sincere utterance from his hearer.

"But you talk as if it were a crime! Does

anyone call you wicked and godless, because you have human feelings? I never should call you so. And, I believe, we were meant to love."

"To love? Ah, yes, Rhoda! To love for evermore, and in a measure we can but faintly conceive here below. The young maiden I love is still dearer to me than any other human being—it may be that even the angels in Heaven know what it is to love one blessed spirit above the rest—but her soul is more precious to me than her beauty, or her sweet ways, or her happiness on earth. Oh, Rhoda, look upward! Yet a little while and the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, and there cometh peace unspeakable. This earthly love is but a fleeting show. Can you say that you connect it with your hope of Heaven and your faith in God? Does he whom you love reverence the things you have been taught to hold sacred? Is he awakened to a sense of sin? No! no! A thousand times, no! Rhoda, for his sake—for the sake of that darkened soul, if not for your own—yield not to the temptation which makes you untrue in word and deed, and chills your worship, and weighs down the wings of your spirit! Tell this beloved one that, although he were the very life-blood of your heart, yet, if he seek not salvation, you will cast him from you."

Rhoda had sunk down, half-crouching, half-kneeling, with her arms upon a chair, and her

face bowed down upon her hands. She was crying bitterly, but silently; but, at the preacher's last words, she moved her shoulders, like one in pain, and uttered a little inarticulate sound.

Powell bent forward, listening eagerly. "I speak not as one without understanding," he said, after an instant's pause. "I plentifully declare the thing as it is, and as I know it. Your love——! Rhoda, your little twinkling flame, compared to the passionate nature in me, is as the faint light of a taper to a raging fire—as a trickling water-brook to the deep, dreadful sea! Child, child, you know not the power of the Lord. His voice has said to my unquiet soul, 'Be still,' and it obeys Him. Shall He not speak peace to your purer, clearer spirit also? Shall He not carry you, as a lamb, in His bosom? Now—it may be even now, as I speak to you, that His angels are about you, moving your heart towards Him. Rhoda, Rhoda, will you grieve those messengers of mercy? Will you turn away from that unspeakable love?"

The girl suddenly lifted her face. It was a tear-stained, wistfully imploring face, and yet it wore a singular expression of timid obstinacy. She was struggling to ward off the impression his words were making on her. She was unwilling, and afraid to yield to it.

But when she looked up and saw his counten-

ance so pale, so earnest, without one trace of anger or impatience, or any feeling save profoundest pity, and sweetness, and sorrow, her heart melted. The right chord was touched. She could not be moved by compassion for herself, but she was penetrated by sorrow for him.

In an impulse of pitying sympathy she exclaimed, "Oh, don't be so sorry for me, Mr. Powell! I will try! I will do what you say, if——"

The door opened, and her father stood in the room. Rhoda sprang from her knees, rushed past him, and out at the open door.

"Man, man, what have you done?" cried Powell, wringing his hands. Then he sat down and hid his face.

Jonathan Maxfield stood looking at him with a heavy frown. "We must have no more o' this," he said harshly.

CHAPTER X.

The time which elapsed between Rhoda's first visit to Minnie Bodkin and the beginning of February —February, which was to carry Algernon Errington away to the great metropolis—was a vexed and stormy one for the Maxfield household.

Jonathan Maxfield had come to a downright quarrel with the preacher—or to something as near to a quarrel as can be attained, where the violence and vituperation are all on one side—and had ordered Powell out of his house. This was a serious step, and was sure to be searchingly canvassed. Maxfield absented himself from the next class-meeting on the plea of ill-health. There was a general knowledge in the class and throughout the Society that there had been a breach, and many members began to take sides rather warmly.

Maxfield was not a personally popular man, but he had considerable influence amongst his fellow Wesleyans; the influence of wealth, and a strong

will, and the long habit of being a leading personage. David Powell, on the other hand, was not heartily liked by many of the congregation.

The Whitford Methodists had slid into a sleepy, comfortable state of mind in their obscure little corner. They acquired no new members, and lost no old ones. Even the well-devised machinery of Methodism, so calculated to enforce movement and quicken attention, had grown somewhat rusty in Whitford. Frequent change of preachers is a powerful spur to sluggish hearers; but even this—among the fundamental peculiarities of Methodism—was very seldom applied to the Whitfordians. Circumstances, and their own apathy, had brought it to pass that two elderly preachers—steady, jog-trot old roadsters—had alternately succeeded each other in exhorting and preaching to this quiet flock for several years. There was, besides, Nick Green, foreman to Mr. Gladwish, the shoemaker, who enjoyed the rank of local preacher for a time, but who finally seceded from the main body, and drew with him half-a-dozen or so of the more zealous or excitable worshippers, who subscribed to hire a room over a corn-dealer's storehouse in Lady Lane, and by the stentorian vehemence of this Sunday devotion there speedily acquired the title of Ranters.

Into this sleepy, comfortable Whitford society David Powell had burst with his startling energy

and fiery eloquence, and it was impossible to be sleepy and comfortable any longer. No one likes to be suddenly roused from a doze, and Powell had awakened Whitford as with the sound of a trumpet. Yet, after the effects of the first start and shock had subsided, the Methodists began to take pride in the attention which their preacher attracted. Their little chapel was crowded. His field-preaching drew throngs of people from all the country side. Instead of being merely an obscure little knot of Dissenters, about whom no outsider troubled himself, they felt themselves to be objects of general observation. Old men, who had heard Wesley preach half a century ago, declared that this Welshman had inherited the mantle of their founder.

But then came, by no slow or doubtful degrees, the discovery that David Powell had inherited more than the traditional eloquence of John Wesley; and that, like that wonderful man, he spared neither himself nor others in the service of his Master.

He set up a standard of conduct which dismayed many, even of the leading Methodists, who did not share that exaltation of spirit which supported Powell in his disdain of earthly comforts. And the awful sincerity of his character was found by many to be absolutely intolerable.

He made a strong effort to revive the early

morning services, which had quite fallen into desuetude at Whitford. What! Go to pray in the cold little meeting-house at five o'clock on a winter's morning? There was scarcely one of the congregation whose health would allow of such a proceeding.

Then his matter-of-fact interpretations of much of the Gospel teaching was excessively startling. He would coolly expect you to deprive youself not only of superfluities, but of necessaries—such, for instance, as three meals of flesh-meat a day, which are clearly indispensable for health—in order to give to the poor.

It must be owned that he practised his own precepts in this respect; and that he literally gave away all he had, beyond the trifling sum which was needful to clothe him with decency, and to feed him in a manner which the Whitfordians considered reprehensibly inadequate. Such asceticism savoured almost of monkery. It was really wrong. At least it was to be hoped that it was wrong; otherwise—— !

So the awakening preacher by no means had all his flock on his side, when they suspected him to be in opposition to old Max.

Jonathan's mind had been, as he expressed it, greatly exercised respecting his daughter. He was drawn different ways by contending impulses.

To speak to Rhoda openly; to send her to

Duckwell, out of Algernon's way; to let things go on as they were going; (for was not Rhoda's reception by the Bodkins manifestly a preliminary step to her permanent rise in the social scale?) to talk openly to Algernon, and demand his intentions: all these plans presented themselves to his mind in turn, and each in turn appeared the most desirable.

Jonathan was not an irresolute man in general, because he never doubted his own perfect competency to deal with circumstances as they arose in his life. But now he felt his ignorance. He did not understand the ways of gentlefolks. He might injure his daughter by his attempt to serve her. And although he had fits of self-assertion (during which he made much of the value of his own money and of Rhoda's merits), all did not avail to free his spirit from the subjection it was in to "gentlefolks."

Again, he was urged not to seem to distrust the Erringtons by a strong feeling of opposition to Powell. Powell had warned him against letting Rhoda associate with them. Powell had even gone so far as to reprehend him for having done so. To prove Powell wholly wrong and presumptuous, and himself wholly right and sagacious, was a very powerful motive with Maxfield.

Then, too, the one soft place in his heart contributed, no less than the above-mentioned feelings, to make him pause before coming to a decisive explanation with the Erringtons, which might—yes,

he could not help seeing that it might—result in a total breach between his family and them, and this increased his hesitation as to the line of conduct he should pursue. For the conviction had been growing on him daily that Rhoda's happiness was seriously involved; and Rhoda's happiness was a tremendously high stake to play.

The discussion between himself and Powell did not trouble Maxfield so much. The world—his little world, as important to him as other little worlds are to the titled, or the rich, or the fashionable, or the famous—supposed him to be greatly chagrined and exercised in spirit on this account. And people sympathised with him, or blamed him, according to their prejudices, their passions, or—sometimes—their convictions. But the truth was, old Max cared little about being at odds with the preacher, or with the congregation, or with both.

He had been an important personage among the Whitford Methodists, all through the old comfortable days of sleepy concord. And was he now to become a less important personage in these new times of "awakening?" Better war than an ignominious peace!

Nay, there came at last to be a talk of expelling him from the Methodist Society, unless he would confess his fault towards the preacher, and amend it. Maxfield had no lack of partisans in Whitford,

as has been stated; but then there was the superintendent! In those days the superintendent (or, as some old-fashioned Methodists continued to call him, in the original Wesleyan phrase, the assistant) of the circuit in which Whitford was situated, was a man of great zeal and sincere enthusiasm.

For those unacquainted with the mechanism of Methodism, it may be well briefly to state what were this person's functions.

Long before John Wesley's death, the whole country was divided into circuits, in which the itinerant preachers made their rounds; and of each circuit the whole spiritual and temporal business —so far as they were connected with the aims and interests of Methodism — was under the regulation of the assistant (afterwards styled the superintendent), whose office it was to admit or expel members, take lists of the society at Easter, hold quarterly meetings, visit the classes quarterly, preside at the love-feasts, and so forth.

The period for the superintendent's next visit to Whitford was rapidly approaching. Maxfield weighed the matter, and tried to forecast the result of a formal reference of the disagreement between himself and Powell to this man's judgment. Had this superintendent, Mr. John Bateson by name, been a Whitford man, one of the old, comfortable, narrow-minded tradesmen over whom "old Max" had exercised supremacy in things Methodistical

for years, Maxfield would have felt no doubt but that the matter would have ended in an unctuous admonition to Powell to moderate his unseemly excess of zeal, and in the establishment of himself, more firmly than ever, in his place as leader of the congregation.

But Mr. Bateson could not be relied on to take this sensible view. He was one of the new-fangled, upsetting, meddling sort, and would doubtless declare David Powell to have been performing his bounden duty, in being instant in season and out of season.

"So that," thought Jonathan, "I should not be master in my own house!"

And if he included in the notion of being master in his own house the power of shutting out his fellow Methodists—preacher and all—from the knowledge of his most private family affairs, the conclusion was a pretty just one. Moreover, it was one to which the very constitution of Methodism pointed *à priori*. But old Maxfield had never in his life been brought into collision with any one who carried out his principles to their legitimate and logical results, as did David Powell.

Maxfield's creed was a thing to take out and air, and acknowledge at chapel, and prayer-meetings, and field-preachings, and such like occasions; whilst his practice was—well, it cer-

tainly was not "too bright or good for human nature's daily food."

David Powell's uncompromising interpretation of certain precepts was intolerable to many besides Maxfield. But the majority of the Whitford Methodists looked forward to Powell's removal to another sphere of action. His stay among them had already been longer than was usual with the itinerant preachers; but it was understood to have been specially prolonged, in consequence of the abundant fruits brought forth by his ministration in Whitford. Still he would go, sooner or later, and then there would be a relaxation of the strong tension in which men's minds and consciences had been strained by the strange influence of this preacher.

But old Maxfield thought it very probable that, before leaving Whitford, the preacher might compass his (Maxfield's) expulsion from the Methodist body.

Then he took a great resolution.

One Sunday, Jonathan, James, and Rhoda Maxfield, together with Elizabeth Grimshaw, were seen at the morning service in the abbey church of St. Chad's, and again in the afternoon.

Dr. Bodkin himself stared down from his pulpit at the Methodist family. Those of the congregation to whom they were known by sight—and these were the great majority—found their devo-

tions quite disturbed by this unexpected addition to their number.

The Maxfields kept their eyes on their prayer-books, and, outwardly, took no heed of the attention they excited. Old Jonathan and his son James looked pretty much as usual; Rhoda trembled, and blushed, and looked painfully shy whenever the forms of the service required her to rise, so as to bring her face above the pew (those were the days of pews) and within easy range of the curious eyes of the congregation.

But Betty Grimshaw held her head aloft, and uttered the responses in a loud voice, and without glancing at her book, as one to whom the Church of England service was entirely familiar. Betty was heartily delighted with the family conversion from the errors of Methodism, and supported her brother-in-law in it with great warmth. Her Methodism had, in truth, been a mere piece of conformity, for "peace and quietness' sake," as she avowed with much candour. And she was fond of saying that she had been "bred up to the Church;" by which phrase it must not be understood that Betty intended to convey to her hearers that she had entered on an ecclesiastical career.

If the sensation created in the abbey church by the Maxfields' appearance there was great, the surprise and excitement caused by their absence from

the Methodist chapel was still greater. By the afternoon of that same Sunday it was known to all the Wesleyans that old Max, with his family, had been seen at St. Chad's. No one deemed it strange that the whole family should have seceded in a body from their own place of worship. It appeared quite natural to all his old acquaintances that, whither Jonathan Maxfield went, his son, and his daughter, and his sister-in-law should follow him. It is probable that, had he turned Jew or Mohammedan, they would equally have taken it for granted that his conversion involved that of the rest of his family, which opinion was certainly complimentary to old Max's force of character.

And such force of character as consists in pursuing one's own way single-mindedly, old Max undoubtedly possessed. A good, solid belief in oneself, tempered by an inability to see more than one side of a question, will cleave its way through the world like a wedge. We have seen, however, that into Maxfield's mind a doubt of himself on one subject had entered. And, as doubt will do, it weakened his action very considerably as regarded that subject; but on all other matters he was himself, and perhaps infused an extra amount of obstinacy and self-assertion into his behaviour, as though to counterbalance the one weak point.

Towards his old co-religionists he showed himself inflexible. Mr. Bateson, the superintendent,

duly arrived, but Jonathan refused to see him, and walked out of his shop when the superintendent walked into it. Maxfield was grimly triumphant, and kept out of the reach of any expression of displeasure from Mr. Bateson, if displeasure he felt.

His defection was undoubtedly a blow to the Methodist community in Whitford. And much indignation, not loud but deep, was aroused in consequence against Powell, who was looked upon as the prime cause of it. What if the preacher did possess awakening eloquence and burning zeal to save sinners? Here was Jonathan Maxfield, a warm man, a respectable and a thriving man, an ancient pillar of the Society, lost to it beyond recall by Powell's means!

And by whom did Powell seek to replace such a man as old Max? By Richard Gibbs, the groom —brother of Minnie Bodkin's maid—who had hitherto enjoyed a reputation for unmitigated blackguardism; by Sam Smith, the cobbler, once drunken, now drunken no longer; by stray vagrants who were converted at his field-preaching, and by the poorest poor, and wretchedest wretched, generally!

And the worst of it was, that one could not openly find fault with all this. David Powell would, with mild yet fervent earnestness, quote some New Testament text, which stopped one's mouth, if it

didn't change one's opinion. As if the words ought to be interpreted in that literal way! Well, he would go away before long; that was some comfort.

The period during which this rift in the Methodist community was widening, was a time of peculiar pleasantness to some of our Whitford acquaintance. Of these was Minnie Bodkin. By degrees the habit had established itself among a few of her friends, of meeting every Saturday afternoon in Dr. Bodkin's drawing-room.

Mr. Diamond usually made one at these meetings. Saturday was a half-holiday at the Grammar School, and he was thus at leisure. He had grown more sociable of late, and Mrs. Errington was convinced that this change was entirely owing to her advice. There was Algernon, whose sparkling spirits made him invaluable. There was Mrs. Errington, who was made welcome, as other mothers sometimes are, in right of the merits of her offspring. There was Miss Chubb very often. There was the Reverend Peter Warlock, nearly always. And of all people in the world there would often be seen Rhoda Maxfield, modestly ensconced behind Minnie's couch, or half hidden by the voluminous folds of Mrs. Errington's gown.

No sooner had Mrs. Errington heard of Rhoda's first visit to Dr. Bodkin's house, than she took all the credit of the invitation to herself. She decided

that it must certainly be due to her report of Rhoda. And—partly because she really wished to be kind to the girl, partly because it seemed pretty clear that Minnie was resolved to have her own way about seeing more of her new *protégée*, and Mrs. Errington was minded that this should come to pass with her co-operation, so as to retain her post of first patroness—the good lady fostered the intimacy by all means in her power. The Italians have a proverb, to the effect that there are persons who will take credit to themselves for the sunshine in July. Mrs. Errington would complacently have assumed the merit of the whole solar system.

Now, at these Saturdays, there grew and strengthened themselves many conflicting feelings, and hopes, and illusions. It was a game at cross purposes, to which none of the players held the key except Algernon.

That young gentleman's perceptions, unclouded and uncoloured by strong feeling, were pretty clear and accurate. However, the period of his departure was fast approaching, and, "after me, the deluge," might be taken to epitomise his sentiments in view of possible complications which threatened to arise among his own intimate circle of friends. To whatever degree the time might seem to be out of joint, Algy would never torment himself with the fancy that he was born to set it

right. "If there is to be a mess, I am better out of it," was his ingenuous reflection.

Meanwhile, whatever thoughts might be flitting about under his bright curls, nothing, save the most winning good-humour, the most insouciant hilarity, ever peeped for an instant out of his frank, shining eyes. And the weeks went by, and February was at hand.

CHAPTER XI.

In how few cases would the power to "see oursel's as ithers see us" be other than a very malevolent and wicked fairy-like gift! And, perhaps, the discovery of the real reasons why our friends like us, would not be the least mortifying part of the revelation.

Now, the Bodkins liked Miss Chubb. But they did not like her for her manners, her knowledge of the usages of polite society, her highly respectable clerical connections, or the little gummed-down curls on her forehead; on all of which Miss Chubb prided herself.

Dr. Bodkin liked her principally because she was an old acquaintance. It pleased him to see various people, and to do and say various things daily, often for no better reason than that he had seen the same people, and done and said the same things yesterday, and throughout a long, backward-reaching chain of yesterdays. Mrs. Bodkin

liked her because she was good-natured, and neither strong-minded nor strong-willed enough to domineer over her. Minnie liked her because she found her peculiarities very amusing.

"Miss Chubb has the veriest rag-bag of a mind," said Minnie, "and pulls out of it, every now and then, unexpected scraps of ignorance as other folks display bits of knowledge, in the oddest way!" She could often endure to listen to Miss Chubb's chatter, when the talk of wiser people irritated her nerves. And Minnie would speak with Miss Chubb on many subjects more unreservedly than she did with any other of her acquaintances.

"What Minnie Bodkin can find in that affected old maid, to have her so much with her when she is so reserved and stand-offish to—to quite superior persons, and nearer her own age, I am at a loss to understand!" Violet McDougall would say, tossing her thin spiral ringlets. And Rose, the bitterer of the two, would make answer, raspingly: "Why, Miss Chubb toadies her, my dear. That's the secret. Poor Minnie! Of course one wishes to make every allowance for her afflicted state; but there are limits. Miss Chubb is almost a fool, and that suits poor dear Minnie's domineering spirit."

Unconscious of these and similar comments, Minnie and Miss Chubb continued to be very good friends.

There sat Miss Chubb in Dr. Bodkin's drawing-room one Saturday about noon; her round face beaming, and her fat fingers covered with huge old-fashioned rings, busily engaged in some bright-coloured worsted work. She had come early, and was to have luncheon with Mrs. Bodkin and Minnie, and was a good deal elated by the privilege, although she did her best to repress any ebullition of her good spirits, and to assume the languishing air which she chose to consider peculiarly genteel.

Minnie and Miss Chubb were alone. Mrs. Bodkin was "busy." Mrs. Bodkin was nearly always "busy." She superintended the machinery of her household very effectively. But she was one of those persons whose labours meet with scant recognition. Dr. Bodkin had a vague idea that his wife liked to be fussing about in kitchen and store-room, and that she did a great deal more than was necessary, but, "then, you see, it amused her." He very much liked order, punctuality, economy, and good cookery; and since it "amused" Laura to supply him with these, the combination was at once fortunate and satisfactory.

"My dear Minnie," said Miss Chubb, raising her eyes to the ceiling with a languishing glance, which would have been more effective had it not been invariably accompanied by an odd wrinkling up of the nose, "did you ever, in all your days

hear of anything so extraordinary as the appearance of those Methodist people at church on Sunday?"

"It was strange."

"Strange! My dear love, it was amazing. But it ought to be a matter of congratulation to us all, to see Dissenters embracing the canons of the Church! And the Methodists, especially, are such dreadful people. I believe they think nothing of foaming at the mouth, and going into convulsions, in the open chapel. I wonder if those Maxfields felt anything of the kind on Sunday? It would have been a terrible thing, my dear, if they had had to be carried out on stretchers, or anything of that sort. What would Mr. Bodkin have said?"

"I don't think there's any fear of papa's sermons throwing anybody into convulsions."

"Of course not, my dear child. Pray don't imagine that I hinted at such a thing. No, no; Mr. Bodkin is ever gentlemanlike, ever soothing and composing, in the pulpit. But people, you know, who have been used to convulsions—they really might not be able to leave them off all at once. You may smile, my dear Minnie; but I assure you that such things have been known to become quite chronic. And, once a thing gets to be chronic——"

Miss Chubb left her sentence unfinished, as she

often did; but remained with an expressive countenance, which suggested horrible results from "things getting to be chronic."

"It seems an odd caprice of Fate," said Minnie, who had been pursuing her own reflections, "that, no sooner do I make Rhoda Maxfield's acquaintance, for the sole reason that she is a Methodist, than she and her family turn into orthodox church people."

"People will say you converted her, my dear."

"I daresay they will, as it isn't true."

"Now, I wonder who did convert them."

"If you care to know, I think I can tell you that the real reason why Maxfield left the Wesleyans, was a quarrel he had with their preacher. My maid Jane has a brother who belongs to the Society; and he gave her an account of the matter."

"Dear, dear! You don't say so! Of course the preacher is furious? Those kind of Ranters are very violent sometimes. I remember, when I was quite a girl, a man on a tub, who used to scream and use the most dreadful language. So much so, that poor papa forbade our going within earshot of him."

"No; David Powell is not furious. I am told that he astonished some of the more bigoted of his flock, by reminding them that they ought to have

charity enough to believe that a man may worship acceptably in any Christian community."

"Did he really? Now, that positively was very proper of the man, and very right. Quite right, indeed."

"So that I think we may assume that he is on the road to Heaven, Methodist though he be."

"Oh, Minnie!"

"Does that shock you, Miss Chubb?"

"Well, my dear, yes; it does, rather. My family has been connected with the Church for generations. And—one doesn't like to hear Dr. Bodkin's daughter talk of being sure that a Dissenter is on the road to Heaven."

Minnie lay back on her sofa, and looked at Miss Chubb complacently bending over her knitting. Gradually the look of amused scorn on Minnie's face softened into melancholy thoughtfulness. She wondered how David Powell would have met such an observation as Miss Chubb's. He had to deal with even narrower and more ignorant minds than hers. What method did he take to touch them? To Minnie it all seemed very hopeless, so long as men and women continued to be such as those she saw around her. And yet this preacher did move them very powerfully. If she could but meet him face to face, and have speech with him!

There was one person to whom she was strongly

impelled to detail her perplexities, and to express her fluctuating feelings and opinions on more momentous subjects than she had ever yet spoken with him upon. But there were a hundred little counter impulses pulling against this strong one, and holding it in check.

Miss Chubb's voice broke in upon her meditations by uttering loudly the name that was in Minnie's mind.

"My dear, I think it's quite a case with Mr. Diamond."

Minnie's heart gave a great bound; and the deep, burning blush which was so rare and meant so much with her, covered her face from brow to chin. Miss Chubb's eyes were fixed on her knitting. When, after a short pause, she raised them to seek some response, Minnie was quite pale again. She met Miss Chubb's gaze with bright, steady eyes, a thought more wide open than usual.

"How do you mean 'a case'?" she asked carelessly.

"I mean, my dear, a case of falling, or having fallen, in love."

The white lids drooped a little over the beautiful eyes, and a look, partly of pleasure, partly of fluttered surprise, swept over Minnie's face, as the breeze sweeps over a corn-field, touching it with shifting lights and shadows.

"What nonsense!" she said, in a little uncertain voice, unlike her usual clear tones.

"Now, my dear Minnie, I must beg to differ. I might give up my judgment to you on a point of—of—" (Miss Chubb hesitated a long time here, for she found it extremely difficult to think of any subject on which she didn't know best)—"on a point of the dead languages, for instance. But on this point I maintain that I have a certain penetration and coo-doyl. And I say that it is a case with Mr. Diamond and little Rhoda—at least on his side. And of course she would be ready to jump out of her skin for joy, only I don't think the idea has entered into her head as yet. How should it, in her station? Of course——. But as to him——! If I ever read a human countenance in my life, he admires her—oh, over head and ears! To see him staring at her from behind your sofa when she sits by Mrs. Errington——! No, no, my dear; depend upon it, I am correct. And I don't know but what it might do very well, because, although educated, Mr. Diamond is a man of no birth. And the girl is pretty, and will have all old Max's savings. So that really——"

Thus, and much more in the same disjointed fashion, Miss Chubb.

Minnie felt like one who is conscious of having swallowed a deadly but slow poison. For the present there is no pain; only a horrible watchful

apprehension of the moment when the pain shall begin.

Some faculties of her mind seemed curiously numb. But the active part of it accepted the truth of what had been said, unhesitatingly.

Miss Chubb paused at last breathless.

"You look fagged, Minnie," she said. "Have I tired you? Mrs. Bodkin will scold me if I have."

"No; you have not tired me. But I think I will go and be quiet in my own room. Tell mamma I don't want any lunch. Please ring for Jane."

Mrs. Bodkin came into the room in her quick, noiseless way. She had heard the bell. Minnie reiterated her wish to be wheeled into her own room, and left quiet. She spoke briefly and peremptorily, and her desire was promptly complied with.

"I never cross her, or talk to her much when she is not feeling well," whispered Mrs. Bodkin to Miss Chubb; thereby checking a lively stream of suggestions, regrets, and inquiries which the spinster was beginning to pour forth in her most girlish manner.

"There, my darling," said her mother, preparing to close the door of Minnie's room softly. "If any of the Saturday people come I shall say you are not well enough to see them to-day."

"No!" cried Minnie, with sharp decisiveness. "I wish to come into the drawing-room by-and-by. Don't send them away. It will be Algy's last Saturday. I mean to come into the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XII.

Minnie, during the hour's quiet solitude which was hers before the Saturday guests began to arrive, got her thoughts into some clear order, and began to look things in the face. She did not look far ahead; merely kept her attention fixed on that which the next few hours might hold for her. She pictured to herself what she would say, and even how she would look. Cost what it might, no trace of her real feelings should appear. Her heart might bleed, but none should see the wound. She could not yet tell herself how deep the hurt was. She would not look at it, would not probe it. Not yet! That should be afterwards; perhaps in the long dim hours of her sleepless night. Not yet!

She put on her panoply of pride, and braced up her nerves to a pitch of strained excitement. And then, after all, the effort seemed to have been wasted! There was no fight to be fought, no struggle to be made. The social atmosphere

among her visitors that Saturday afternoon was as mildly relaxing as the breath of a misty woodland landscape in autumn, and Minnie felt her Spartan mood melting beneath it.

Whether it were due to the influence of Dr. Bodkin's presence (the doctor usually spent the Saturday half-holiday in his study, preparing the morrow's sermon; or, it may be, occasionally reading the newspaper, or even taking a nap)—or whether it were the shadow of Algernon's approaching departure, the fact was that the little company appeared depressed, and attuned to melancholy.

Rhoda Maxfield was not there. She had privately told Algy that she could not bear to be present among his friends on that last Saturday. "They will be saying 'Good-bye' to you, and—and all that," said the girl, with quivering lips. "And I know I should burst out crying before them all." Whereupon Algy had eagerly commended her prudent resolution to stay at home.

No other of the accustomed frequenters of the Bodkins' drawing-room was absent. The doctor's was the only unusual presence in the little assembly. He stood in his favourite attitude on the hearth, and surveyed the company as if they had been a class called up for examination. Mr. Diamond sat beside Miss Bodkin's sofa, and was, perhaps, a thought more grave and silent than usual.

Minnie lay with half-closed eyes on her sofa,

and felt almost ashamed of the proud resolutions she had been making. It seemed very natural to be silently miserable. No one appeared to expect her to be anything else. If she had even begun to cry, as Miss Chubb did when Algernon went to the piano and sang "Auld Lang Syne," it would have excited no wondering remark.

Pathos was not Algy's forte in general, but circumstances gave a resistless effect to his song. The tears ran down Miss Chubb's cheeks, so copiously, as to imperil the little gummed curls that adorned her face. Even the Reverend Peter Warlock, who was a little jealous of Algy's high place in Miss Bodkin's good graces, exhibited considerable feeling on this occasion, and joined in the chorus "For au—auld la—ang syne, my friends," with his deep bass voice, which had a hollow tone like the sound of the wind in the belfry of St. Chad's.

Here Mrs. Errington's massive placidity became useful. She broke the painful pause which ensued upon the last note of the song, by asking Dr. Bodkin, in a sonorous voice, if he happened to be acquainted with Lord Seely's remarkably brilliant pamphlet on the dog-tax.

"No," replied the doctor, shaking his head slowly and emphatically, as who should say that he challenged society to convict him of any such acquaintance.

It did not at all matter to Mrs. Errington whether he had or had not read the pamphlet in question, the existence of which, indeed, had only come to her own knowledge that morning, by the chance inspection of an old newspaper that had been hunted out to wrap some of Algy's belongings in. What the good lady had at heart was the introduction of Lord Seely's name, in whose praise she forthwith began a flowing discourse.

This brought Miss Chubb, figuratively speaking, to her legs. She always a little resented Mrs. Errington's aristocratic pretensions, and was accustomed to oppose to them the fashionable reminiscences of her sole London season, which had been passed in an outwardly smoke-blackened and inwardly time-tarnished house in Manchester Square, whereof the upper floors had been hired furnished for a term by the Right Reverend the Bishop of Plumbunn. And the bishop's lady had "chaperoned" Miss Chubb to such gaieties as seemed not objectionable to the episcopal mind. As the rose-scent of youth still clung to the dry and faded memories of that time, Miss Chubb always recurred to them with pleasure.

Having first carefully wiped away her tears by the method of pressing her handkerchief to her eyes and cheeks as one presses blotting-paper to wet ink, so as not to disturb the curls, Miss Chubb plunged, with happy flexibility of mood, into the

midst of a rout at Lady Tubville's, nor paused until she had minutely described five of the dresses worn on that occasion, including her own and the bishopess's, from shoe to head-dress.

Mrs. Errington came in ponderously. "Tubville? I don't know the name. It isn't in Debrett?"

"And the supper!" pursued Miss Chubb, ignoring Debrett. "Such refinement, together with such luxury—! It was a banquet for Lucretius."

"What, what?" exclaimed the doctor in his sharp, scholastic key. He had been conversing in a low voice with Mr. Warlock, but the Latin name caught his ear.

"I am speaking of a supper, Dr. Bodkin, at the house of a leader of tong. I never shall forget it. Although I didn't eat much of it, to be sure. Just a sip of champagne, and a taste of—of— What do you call that delightful thing, with the French name, that they give at ball suppers? Vo—vo— What is it?"

"Vol-au-vent?" suggested Algy, at a venture.

"Ah! vol-o-voo. Yes; you will excuse my correcting you, Algernon, but that is the French pronunciation. Just one taste of vol-o-voo was all that I partook of; but the elegance—the plate, the exotic bouquets, and the absolute paraphernalia of

wax-lights! It was a scene for young Romance to gloat on!"

"But what had Lucretius to do with it?" persisted the doctor.

Miss Chubb looked up, and shook her forefinger archly.

"Now, Dr. Bodkin, I will not be catechised; you can't give me an imposition, you know. And as to Lucretius, beyond the fact that he was a Roman emperor, who ate and drank a great deal, I honestly own that I know very little about him."

This time the doctor was effectually silenced. He stood with his eyes rolling from Mr. Diamond to the curate, and from the curate to Algy, as though mutely protesting against the utterance of such things under the very roof of the grammar school. But he said not a syllable.

Mr. Diamond had looked at Minnie with an amused smile, expecting to meet an answering glance of amusement at Miss Chubb's speech. But the fringed eyelids hung heavily over the beautiful dark eyes, which were wont to meet his own with such quick sympathy. Mr. Diamond felt a little shock of disappointment. Without giving himself much account of the matter, he had come to consider Miss Bodkin and himself as the only two persons in the little coterie who had an intellectual point of view in common on many topics. The

circumstance that Miss Bodkin was a very beautiful and interesting woman, certainly added a flattering charm to this communion of minds. He had almost grown to look upon her attention and sympathy as peculiarly his own—things to which he had a right. And the unsmiling, listless face which now met his gaze, gave him the same blank feeling that we experience on finding a well-known window, accustomed to present gay flowers to the passers-by, all at once grown death-like with a down-drawn ghastly blind.

Mr. Diamond looked at Minnie again, and was struck with the expression of suffering on her face. He knew she disliked being condoled with about her health; so he said gently, "I think Errington's departure is depressing us all. Even Miss Bodkin looks dull."

Minnie lifted her eyelids now, and her wan look of suffering was rather enhanced by the view of those bright, wistful eyes.

"I think Errington is an enviable fellow," continued Mr. Diamond.

"So do I. He is going away."

"That's a hard saying for us, who are to remain behind, Miss Bodkin! But I meant—and I think you know that I meant—he is enviable because he will be so much regretted."

"I don't know that he will be 'so much regretted.'"

"Surely—— Why, one fair lady has even been shedding tears!"

"Oh, Miss Chubb? Yes; but that proves very little. The good soul is always overstocked with sentiment, and will use any friend as a waste-pipe to get rid of her superfluous emotion."

"Well, I should have made no doubt that you would be sorry, Miss Bodkin."

"Sorry! Yes; I am sorry. That is to say, I shall miss Algernon. He is so clever, and bright, and gay, and—different from all our Whitford mortals. But for himself, I think one ought to be glad. Papa says, and you say, and I say myself, that his journey to London on such slender encouragement is a wild-goose chase. But, after all, why not? Wild geese must be better to chase than tame ones."

"Not so easy to catch, nor so well worth the catching, though," said Mr. Diamond, smiling.

"I said nothing about catching. The hunting is the sport. If a good fat goose had been all that was wanted, Mr. Filthorpe, of Bristol, offered him that; and even, I believe, ready roasted. But—if I were a man, I think I would rather hunt down my wild goose for myself."

"You had better not let Errington hear your theory about the pleasures of wild-goose hunting."

"Because he is apt enough for the sport already?"

"N—not precisely. But he would take advantage of your phrase to characterise any hunting which it suited him to undertake, and thus give an air of impulse and romance to, perhaps, a very prosaic ambition, very deliberately pursued."

"I wonder why——," said Minnie, and then stopped suddenly.

"Yes! You wonder why?"

"No, I wonder no longer. I think I understand."

"Miss Bodkin is pleased to be oracular," said Mr. Diamond, with a careless smile; and then he moved away towards the piano, where Mrs. Bodkin was playing a quaint sonata of Clementi, and stood listening with a composed, attentive face. Nevertheless, he felt some curiosity about the scope of Minnie's unfinished sentence.

The sentence, if finished, would have run thus: "I wonder why you are so hard on Algernon!" But with the utterance of the first words an explanation of Diamond's severe judgment darted into her mind. Might he not have some feeling of jealousy towards Algernon? (Miss Chubb's words were lighting up many things. Probably the good little woman had never in her life before said anything of such illuminating power.) Yes, Diamond must be jealous. Algernon had unrivalled opportunities of attracting pretty Rhoda's attention. Nay, had he not attracted it already? Minnie

recalled little words, little looks, little blushes, which seemed to point to the real nature of Rhoda's feelings for Algernon. Rhoda did not—no; she surely did not—care for Matthew Diamond. Minnie had a momentary elation of heart as she thus assured herself, and at the same time she felt an impulse of scorn for the girl who could disregard the love of such a man, as though it were a valueless trifle. But, then, did Rhoda know? did Rhoda guess? And then Minnie, suddenly checking her eager mental questioning in mid-career, turned her fiery scorn against herself for her pitiful weakness.

As she lay there so graceful and outwardly tranquil, whilst the studied, passionless turns and phrases of old Clementi trickled from the keys, she had hot fits of raging wounded pride, and cold shudders of deadly depression. The numb listlessness which had shielded her at the beginning of the afternoon had disappeared during her short conversation with Diamond. She was sensitive now to a thousand stinging thoughts.

What a fool she had been! What a poor, blind fool! She tried to remember all the details of the past days. Did others see what Miss Chubb had seen in Diamond's face? And had she—Minnie Bodkin, who prided herself on her keen observation, her cleverness, and her power of reading motives—had she been the only one to miss this obvious fact? She had been deluding

herself with the thought that Matthew Diamond came and sat beside her couch, and talked, and smiled for her sake! Poor fool! Why, did not his frequent visits date from the time when Rhoda's visits had begun, too? It was all clear enough now; so clear, that the self-delusion which had blinded her seemed to have been little short of madness. "As if it were possible that a man should waste his love on me!" she thought bitterly.

At that moment she caught Mr. Warlock's eyes mournfully fixed upon her. His gaze irritated her unendurably. "Am I so pitiable a spectacle?" she asked herself. "Is my folly written on my face, that that idiot stares at me in wonder and compassion?"

Minnie gave him one of her haughtiest and coldest glances, and then turned away her head.

Poor Mr. Warlock! It must be owned that there are strange, cruel pangs unjustly inflicted and suffered in this world by the most civilised persons.

The little party broke up sooner than usual. The dispirited tone with which it had begun continued to the end. Algernon made his farewells to Miss Chubb, Mr. Warlock, Mr. Diamond, and Dr. Bodkin. But to Minnie he whispered, "I will run in once more on Monday to say 'Good-bye' to your mother and to you, if I may."

The rest departed almost simultaneously. Mat-

thew Diamond lingered an instant at the door of the drawing-room, to say to Mrs. Bodkin, "I hope this is not to be the last of our pleasant Saturdays, although we are losing Errington?"

It was an unusual sort of speech from the reserved, shy tutor, who carried his proud dread of being thought officious or intrusive to such a point, that Minnie was wont to say, laughingly, that Mr. Diamond's diffidence was haughtier than anyone else's disdain.

Mrs. Bodkin smiled, well pleased. "Oh, I hope not, indeed!" she said in her quick, low accents. "Minnie! Do you hear what Mr. Diamond is saying?"

Minnie did not answer. She thought how happy this wish of his to keep up "our pleasant Saturdays" would have made her yesterday!

CHAPTER XIII.

The manifestations of maternal vanity are apt to appear monotonous to the indifferent spectator; but, in Mrs. Errington such manifestations were, at least, not open to that reproach. Beethoven himself never surpassed her in the power of producing variations on one simple theme. And this surprising fertility of hers prevented her from being a mere commonplace bore. She never told a story twice alike. There was always an element of unexpectedness in her conversation, albeit the groundwork and foundation of it varied but little. In the overflowing gratification of her heart at Algernon's prospects, and under the excitement of his imminent departure, she would fain have bestowed some of her eloquence even on old Max, with whom her relations had been decidedly cool, since the outbreak of rude temper on his part which has been recorded. But old Max continued to be surly and taciturn for a while; he had been

bitterly mortified by Mrs. Errington's talk about the marriage her son would be able to make, whenever it should please him to select a wife.

But then, after that, had come Miss Bodkin's frequent invitations to Rhoda, which had greatly mollified the old man. And presently it appeared as if Mrs. Errington had forgotten all about General Indigo's daughters, and the heiress of the eminent drysalter. At all events, she said no more on the subject of those ladies. And old Max gradually, and not slowly, recurred to his former persuasion that the Erringtons would be very glad to secure Rhoda's hand for Algernon, being well aware that her money would balance her birth and connections. True, the young man had, as yet, said nothing explicit. But, of course, he would feel it necessary to have some settled prospect before asking permission to engage himself formally to Rhoda.

"He is connected with the great ones of the earth, to be sure!" reflected Mr. Maxfield, with some exultation. "And he is a comely young chap to look upon, and full of all kinds of book-learning and accomplishments—talks foreign tongues, and sings, and plays upon instruments, and draws pictures!"

An uneasy thought crossed his mind at this point, that David Powell would consider these things as leading to reprehensible frivolity and

worldliness; and that, moreover, most of his (Maxfield's) old friends would agree with the preacher in so deeming. It was not to be expected that the thoughts and habits of a lifetime could be so eradicated from old Max's mind by the mere fact of going to worship at St. Chad's, as to leave his conscience absolutely free on these and similar points. But the ultimate effect of such inward feelings was always to embitter the old man against Powell, and to make him clutch eagerly at any circumstance which should tend to prove that Powell had been wrong and himself right in their differing views of the Erringtons' intentions. He was inexpressibly loath to consider himself mistaken. Indeed, for him to be mistaken seemed to argue a general dislocation and turning topsy-turvy of things, and a terrible unchaining of the powers of darkness. If, after walking all his life in the paths of wisdom and prosperity, he were to find himself suddenly astray, and blundering on a point which nearly concerned the only tender feelings of his nature, such a phenomenon must clearly be due to the direct interposition of Satan. However, as he stood one evening in his storehouse, tying up a great parcel of sugar in blue paper, Jonathan Maxfield was feeling neither discontented nor self-distrustful. Mrs. Errington had just been speaking to Rhoda in his presence, and had said:

"Well, little one, you have quite made a

conquest of Mrs. Bodkin, as well as Miss Minnie. She was praising you up to me the other day. She particularly remarked your nice manners, and attributed them to my influence——"

"I'm sure, ma'am, if there is anything nice in my manners, it was you who taught it to me," Rhoda had said simply. Upon which Mrs. Errington had been very gracious, and, without at all disclaiming the credit of Rhoda's nice manners, had mellifluously assured Mr. Maxfield that his little girl was wonderfully teachable, and had become a general favourite amongst her (Mrs. Errington's) friends.

Now all this had seemed to Maxfield to be of good augury, and an additional testimony—if any such were needed—to his own sagacity and prudent behaviour.

"It'll come right, as I foresaw," thought he triumphantly. "Another man might have been over hasty, and spoiled matters like a fool. But not me!"

Some one pushed the half-door between the shop and the storehouse, and set the bell jingling. Maxfield looked up and saw Algernon Errington, bright, smiling, and debonair, as usual.

The ordinary expression of old Max's face was not winning; and now, as he looked up with his grey eyebrows drawn into a shaggy frown, and his jaws clenched so as to hold the end of a string

which he had just drawn into a knot round the parcel of sugar, he presented a countenance ill-calculated to reassure a stranger or invite his confidence. But Algy was not a stranger, and did not intend to bestow any confidence, so he came forward with the graceful self-possession which sat so well on him, and said, "How are you, Mr. Maxfield? I have not seen you for ever so long!"

"It doesn't seem very long ago to me, since we spoke together," returned old Max, tugging at the string of his parcel.

"You know I'm off to-morrow, Mr. Maxfield?"

The old man shot a hard keen glance at him from beneath the shaggy eyebrows, and nodded.

"I go by the early coach in the morning, so I must say all my farewells to-day."

Maxfield gave a sound like a grunt, and nodded again.

"It's a wonderful piece of luck, Lord Seely's taking me up so, isn't it?"

"Ah! if he means to do anything for you in earnest. So far as I can learn, his taking you up hasn't cost him much yet."

Algernon laughed frankly. "Not a bit of it, Mr. Maxfield!" he cried. "And, after all, why should he do anything that would cost him much, for a poor devil like me? No; the beauty of it is, that he can do great things for me which shall cost him nothing! He is hand and glove with the

present ministry, and a regular big-wig at court, and all that sort of thing. The fact of my having good blood in my veins, and being called Aneram Errington, is no merit of mine, of course—just an accident; but it's a deuced lucky accident. I daresay Lord Seely is a stupid old hunks, but then he is Lord Seely, you see. I don't mind saying all this to you, Mr. Maxfield, because you know the world, and you and I are old friends."

It was certainly rather hard on Lord Seely to be spoken of as a stupid old hunks by this lively young gentleman, who knew little more of him than of his great-grandfather, deceased a century ago. But his lordship did not hear the artless little speech, so it did not annoy him; whereas old Max did hear it, and it gratified him considerably for several reasons. It gratified him to be addressed confidentially as one who knew the world; it gratified him to be called an old friend by this relation of the great Lord Seely. And, oddly enough, whilst he was mentally bowing down before the aristocratic magnificence of that nobleman, it gratified him to be told that the bowing down was being performed to a "stupid old hunks," altogether devoid of that wisdom which had been so largely bestowed on himself, the Whitford grocer.

Pleasant and unaffected as was the young fellow's manner to his landlord, there was a nonchalance about it which conveyed that he was quite

aware of the social distance between them. And this assumption of superiority—never coarse or ponderous, like his mother's, but worn with the airiest lightness—was far from displeasing to old Max. The more of a gentleman born and bred Algernon Errington showed himself to be, the higher would Rhoda's position be, if—but old Max had almost discarded that form of presenting the future to his own mind; and was apt to say to himself, "when Rhoda marries young Errington." And then the solid advantages of the position were, so far at least, on old Max's side. Wealth and wisdom made a powerful combination, he reflected. And he was not at all afraid of being borne down or overwhelmed by any amount of gentility. Nevertheless, his spirit was in some subjection to this patrician youth, who sat opposite to him on a tea-chest, swinging his legs so affably.

There was a pause. At length Maxfield said, "And how long do you think o' being away? Or are you going to say good-bye to Whitford for evermore?"

"Indeed I hope not!"

"Oh! Then there is some folks here as you would care to see again?" said Maxfield slowly, beginning to tie up another parcel with sedulous care, and not raising his eyes from it.

"Of course there are! I—I should think you must know that, Mr. Maxfield! But I want to

put myself in a better position with the world before I can—before I come back to the people I most care for."

"Very good. But it's like to be some time first, I'm afraid."

"As to seeing dear old Whitford again, you know I mean to run down here in the summer; or at least early in the autumn, when Parliament rises."

"Oh, you do?"

"To be sure! And then I hope to—to settle several things."

"Ah!"

"To a man of your experience, Mr. Maxfield, I needn't say how important it is for me to go to Lord Seely, ready and willing to undertake any employment he may offer me."

"Ah!"

"I mean, of course, that I should be absolutely free and unfettered, and ready to—to—to avail myself of opportunities. You see that, of course?"

Maxfield looked sage, and nodded. But he also looked a little glum. The conversation had not taken the turn he expected.

"Once let me get something definite—a Government post, you know, such as my cousin could get for me as easily as you could take an apprentice—and then I may please myself. I may consider myself on the first round of the ladder. And there

won't be the same necessity for deferring to this person and that person. But I don't know why I'm saying all this to you, Mr. Maxfield. You understand the whole matter better than I do. By Jove, I wish I'd some of your ballast in my noddle. I'm such a feather-headed fellow!"

"You are young, Algernon, you are young," returned old Max, from whose brow the frown had cleared away entirely. "I have had a special gift of wisdom vouchsafed to me for many years past. It has been, I believe, a peculiar grace, and it is the Lord's doing, thanks be! I am not easy deceived."

"I shouldn't like to try it on, that's all I know!" exclaimed Algernon, pleasantly smiling and nodding his head.

"Albeit there is some as mistrust my judgment; young and raw men without much gift of clear-headedness, and puffed up with spiritual pride."

"Are there, really?" said Algernon, feeling somewhat at a loss what to say.

"Yes, there are. I should like such to be convinced of error. It would be a wholesome lesson."

"Not a doubt of it."

"I should like such to know—for their own soul's sake, and to teach 'em Christian humility—as you and I quite understand each other, my young friend; and as all is clear between us."

Algernon had a constitutional dislike to "clear understandings," except such as were limited to his clear understanding of other people. So he broke in at this point with one of his impulsive speeches about his prospects, and his conviction of Mr. Maxfield's wisdom, and his regrets at leaving Whitford, and his settled purpose to come back at the end of the summer and have a look at the dear old place, and the one or two persons in it who were still dearer to him. And he contrived—"contrived," indeed, is too cold-blooded and Machiavelian a word to express Algy's rapid mental process—to convey to old Max the idea that he was on the high road to fortune; that he had a warm and constant attachment to a certain person whom it was needless to name, seeing that the certain person could be no other than his playmate, pretty Rhoda; and that Mr. Jonathan Maxfield was so sagacious and keen-sighted a personage as to require no wordy explanations such as might have been needful for feebler intelligences. And then Algy said, with a rueful sort of candour, and arching those fair childlike eyebrows of his: "I say, Mr. Maxfield, I shall be awfully short of cash just at first!"

The two hands of Jonathan Maxfield, which had been laid open, and palm downwards, on the counter before him, as he listened, instinctively doubled themselves into fists. He put them one

on the top of the other, and rested his chin on them.

"I don't bother my mother about it, poor dear soul, because I know she has done all she can already. Of course, if I were to hint anything to my cousin—to Lord Seely, you know—I might get helped directly. But I don't want to begin with that, exactly."

"H'm! It 'ud be a test of how much he really does mean, though!"

"Yes; but you know what you said about Lord Seely's doing great things for me which shall cost him nothing. And I felt how true your view was, directly. By George, if I want any advice between now and next August, I shall be tempted to write and ask you for it!"

Maxfield gave a little rasping cough.

"Of course I know the manners and customs of high-bred people well enough. A fellow who comes of an old family like mine seems to suck all that in with his mother's milk, somehow. But that's a mere surface knowledge, after all. And some circumstance might turn up in which I should want a more solid judgment to help my own."

Maxfield coughed again, a little less raspingly. One of his doubled-up hands unclasped itself, and he began to pass it across his stubbly chin.

"By-the-by—what an ass I was not to think

of that before—would you mind lending me twenty pounds till August, Mr. Maxfield?"

"I—I'm not given to lending, Algernon; nor to borrowing either, I thank the Lord."

"Borrowing! No; you're one of the lucky folks of this world, who can grant favours instead of asking them. But it really is of small consequence, after all; I'll manage somehow, if you have any objection. I believe I have a nabob of a godfather, General Indigo, as yellow as a guinea and as rich as a Jew. My mother was talking of him the other day, and, perhaps, it would be better to ask such a little favour of one's own people. I'll look up the nabob, Mr. Maxfield."

It must not be supposed that Algy, in bringing out the name of General Indigo, had any thought of the three lovely Miss Indigos in his mind. He was quite unconscious of the existence of those young ladies; if, indeed, they were not entirely the figments of Mrs. Errington's fertile fancy. Algy had laid no deep plans. He was simply quick at seizing opportunity. The opportunity had presented itself, of dazzling old Max with his nabob godfather, and of—perhaps—inducing the stingy old fellow to lend him what he wanted, by dint of conveying that he did not want it particularly. Algy had availed himself of the opportunity, and the shot had told very effectually.

Old Max never swore. Had he been one of the

common and profane crowd of worldlings, it may be that some imprecation on General Indigo would have issued from his lips; for the mention of that name made him very angry. But old Max had a settled conviction of the probable consignment to perdition of the rich nabob—who was doubtless a purse-proud, tyrannous, godless old fellow—which far surpassed, in its comforting power, the ephemeral satisfaction of an oath. He struck his clenched hand on the counter, and said, testily, "You have not heard what I had it in my mind to say! You are too rash, young man, and broke in on my discourse before it was finished!"

"I beg pardon. Did I?"

"I say that I am not given to lending nor to borrowing; and it is most true. But I have not said that I will refuse to assist you. This is a special case, and must be judged of specially as between you and me."

"Why, of course, I would rather be obliged to you than to the general, who is a stranger to me, in fact, though he is my godfather."

"There's nearer ties than godfathers, Algernon."

Algernon burst into a peal of genuine laughter. "Why, yes," said he, wiping his eyes, "I hope so!"

Old Max did not move a muscle of his face, "What was the sum you named?" he asked, solemnly.

"Oh, I don't know—twenty or thirty pounds would do. Something just to keep me going until my mother's next quarter's money comes in."

"I will lend you twenty pounds, Algernon, for which you will write me an acknowledgment."

"Certainly!"

"Being under age, your receipt is valueless in law. But I wish to have it as between you and me."

"Of course; as between you and me."

Maxfield unlocked a strong-box let into the wall. Algernon—who had often gazed at the outside of it rather wistfully—peeped into it with some eagerness when it was opened; but its contents were chiefly papers and a huge ledger. There was, however, in one corner a well-stuffed black leather pocket-book, from which old Max slowly extracted a crisp, fresh Bank of England note for twenty pounds.

"I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Maxfield," said Algernon, taking the note. He spoke without any over-eagerness, but the gleam of boyish delight in his eyes would not be suppressed.

"And now come into the parlour with me, and write the acknowledgment."

"I say, Mr. Maxfield," said Algernon, when the

receipt had been duly written and signed, "you won't say anything to my mother about this?"

"Do you mean to keep it a secret?" asked the old man, sharply.

"Oh, of course I don't mind all the world knowing, as far as I'm concerned. But the dear old lady might worry herself at not being able to do more for me. Let it be just simply as between you and me," said Algernon, repeating Maxfield's words, but, truth to say, without attaching any very definite meaning to them. The old man pursed up his mouth and nodded.

"Aye, aye," he said, "as between you and me, Algernon; as between you and me."

"Upon my word, that formula of old Max's seems to be a kind of open sesame to purses and strong-boxes and cheque-books! 'As between you and me.' I wonder if it would answer with Lord Seely? Who'd have thought of old Max doing the handsome thing? Well, it's all right enough. I do mean to stick to little Rhoda, especially since her father seems to hint his approbation so very plainly. But it wouldn't do to bind myself just now—for her sake, poor little pet! 'As between you and me!' What a character the old fellow is! I wish he'd made it fifty while he was about it!"

Such was Algernon's mental soliloquy as he walked jauntily down the street, with his hand in his pocket, and the crisp bank-note between his finger and thumb.

CHAPTER XIV.

David Powell sat in his garret chamber. The fast waning light of a February afternoon fell on him as he sat close to the lattice in the sloping roof. He had placed himself there to be able to read the small print of his pocket-bible. But the light was already too dim for that. It was dusk in the garret. The strip of grey cloud, visible from the window, was beginning to turn red at its lower edge as the sun sank. It was the angry flaring red, which is often seen at the close of a cold and cloudy day, and had no suggestion of genial warmth in its deep flush. Such a snow-laden, crimson-bordered wrack of fleecy cloud, as Powell's eyes rested on, might have hung over a Lapland waste. There was no fire in the room, nor any means of making one. It was bitterly cold. The preacher's face looked white and bloodless, as if it were frozen. But he sat still, staring out at the red sunset light on the strip of sky within his view. From his seat on an old chest, which he

had drawn close under the window, he could see nothing but the sky. Not one of the roofs or chimneys of Whitford was visible to him. A black wavering line moved slowly across his field of vision. It was a flight of rooks on their way home to the tall leafless elm-trees in Pudcombe Park. Nothing else moved, except the red flare creeping upward by slow and imperceptible degrees.

Suddenly the little Bible fell from Powell's numbed right hand on to the carpetless floor, and, with a start, he turned his head and looked around him. By contrast with the wintry light without, the garret appeared quite dark to him, and it was not until after a few seconds that his eye became sufficiently accustomed to its gloom, to perceive the book lying almost at his feet. He picked it up, and began to chafe his numbed fingers, rising at the same time, and walking up and down the room.

His thoughts had been straying idly as he sat at the window, with his eyes fixed on the sky. They had gone back to the days of his boyhood, and in memory he had seen the wild Welsh valley where he was born, and heard the bleat of sheep from the hills, as he had listened to it many a summer morning, sitting ragged and barefoot on the turf. And with these recollections the image of Rhoda Maxfield was strangely mingled, appearing and disap-

pearing, like a face in a dream. Indeed, he had been dreaming open-eyed in his solitude, unconscious of the cold and the gathering dusk.

Now, such aimless, vagrant wanderings of the fancy were considered reprehensible by earnest Methodists; and by none were they more strongly disapproved of than by David Powell himself. His life was guided, as nearly as might be, in conformity with the rules laid down by John Wesley himself for the helpers, as his first lay-preachers were called. And among these rules, diligence—unflagging, unfaltering—diligence and the strenuous employment of every minute, so that no fragment of time should be wasted, were emphatically insisted upon. Powell had ceased to read when the daylight waned, and remained in his place by the window, intending to devote a few minutes of the twilight to the rigid self-examination which was his daily habit. And instead, behold! his mind had strayed and wandered in idle recollections and unsanctified imaginings.

Presently he began to mutter to himself, as he paced up and down the chill bare room.

"What have I to do with these things," he said aloud, "when I should be about my Master's business? Where is the comfortable assurance of old days—the bright light which used to shine within my soul, turning its darkness to noon-day? I have

lost my first love;* I have fallen from grace; and the enemy finds a ready entrance for any idle thoughts he wills to put into my mind. And yet —have I not striven? Have I not searched my own heart with sincerity?"

All at once, stopping short in his walk across the garret floor, he threw himself on his knees beside the bed, and, burying his face in his hands, began to pray aloud. The sound of his own voice rising ever higher, as his supplications grew more fervent, hid from his ears the noise of a tap at the door, which was repeated twice or thrice. At length, the person who had knocked pushed the door gently open a little way, and called him by his name, "Mr. Powell! Mr. Powell!"

"Who calls me?" asked the preacher, lifting his head, but not rising at once from his knees.

"It's me, sir; Mrs. Thimbleby. I have made you a cup of herb tea accordin' to the directions in the Primitive Physic,† and there is a handful of fire in the kitchen grate, whilst here it is downright freezing. Dear, dear Mr. Powell, I can't think it right for you to set for hours up here by yourself in the cold!"

* A common expression among the early Methodists, to indicate the first fervour of religious zeal.

† A collectionof receipts, published by John Wesley, under the title of "Primitive Physic; or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing most Diseases."

The good widow—a gentle, loquacious woman, with mild eyes and a humble manner—had advanced into the room by this time, and stood holding up a lighted candle in one hand, whilst with the other she drew her scanty black shawl closer round her shoulders.

"I will come, Mrs. Thimbleby," answered Powell. "Do you go downstairs, and I will follow you forthwith."

"Well, it is a miracle of the Lord if he don't catch his death of cold," muttered the widow as she redescended the steep, narrow staircase. "But there! he is a select vessel, if ever there was one; and a burning and a shining light. And I suppose the Lord will take care of His own, in His own way."

Mrs. Thimbleby sat down by her own clean-swept hearth, in which a small fire was burning brightly. The little kitchen was wonderfully clean. Not a speck of rust marked the bright pewter and tin vessels that hung over the dresser. Not an atom of dust lay on any visible object in the place. There was no sound to be heard save the ticking of the old eight-day clock, and, now and then, the dropping of a coal on to the hearth. As soon as she heard her lodger's step on the stairs, Mrs. Thimbleby bestirred herself to pour out the herb tea of which she had spoken.

"I wish it was China tea, Mr. Powell," she

said, when he entered the kitchen. "But you won't take that, so I know it's no good to offer it to you. Else I have a cup here as is really good, and came out of my new lodger's pot."

"You do not surely take of what is not your own!" cried Powell, looking quickly round at her.

"Lord forbid, sir! No, but the gentleman drinks a sight of tea. And last evening he would have some fresh made, and I say to him"—Mrs. Thimbleby's narrative style was chiefly remarkable for its simplification of the English syntax, by means of omitting all past tenses, and thus getting rid of any difficulty attendant on the conjugation of irregular verbs—"I say, 'Won't you have none of that last as was made for breakfast, as is beautiful tea, and only wants warming up again?' But he refuse; and then I ask him if I may use it myself, seeing I look on it as a sin to waste anything; and he only just look up from his book and nod his head, and say, 'Do what you like with it, ma'am,' and wave his hand as much as to say I may go. He is not much of a one to talk, but he paid the first week punctual, and is as quiet as quiet, and—there he is! I hear his key in the door."

A quick, firm step came along the passage, and Matthew Diamond appeared at the door of the kitchen. "Will you be good enough to give

me a light?" he said, addressing the landlady. Then he saw David Powell standing near the fire, and looked at him curiously. Powell did not turn, nor seem to observe the new comer. His head was bent down, and the firelight partially illumined his profile, which was presented to anyone standing at the door. Mr. Diamond silently formed the word "Preacher?" with his lips, at the same time nodding towards Powell, and raising his eyebrows interrogatively. Mrs. Thimbleby answered aloud with alacrity, well pleased to begin a conversation with her taciturn lodger.

"Yes, sir; it is our preacher, Mr. Powell, as is one of our shiningest lights, and an awakening caller of sinners to repentance. You've maybe heard him preach, sir? A many of the unconverted—ahem!—a many as does not belong to the connexion has come to hear him in Whitford Wesleyan Chapel, and on Whit Meadow. And we have had seasons of abundant blessing and refreshment."

Powell had turned round at the beginning of Mrs. Thimbleby's speech, and was looking earnestly at Mr. Diamond. The latter, who had seen the preacher only in the full tide of his eloquence and the excitement of addressing a crowded audience, was struck by the change in the face now before him. It was much thinner, haggard, and deadly pale. There were lines round the mouth, which

expressed anxiety and suffering; and the eyes were sunk in their orbits, and startlingly bright. Diamond was, in fact, startled out of his usual silent reserve by the glance which met his own, and exclaimed, impulsively, "I'm afraid you are ill, Mr. Powell!"

"No," returned the other at once, and without hesitation. "I have no bodily ailment. I have seen you at the house of Jonathan Maxfield, have I not?"

"Yes; I have been in the habit of going there to read with a young gentleman. My name is Diamond—Matthew Diamond."

"I know it," answered Powell. "I should like, if you are willing, to say a few words to you privately."

Diamond was a good deal surprised, and a little displeased, at this proposition. He had been interested in the Methodist preacher, and the thought had more than once crossed his mind that he should like to see more of the man, whose whole personality was so striking and uncommon. But Mr. Diamond had felt his wish just as he might have wished to have Paganini with his violin all to himself for an evening; or to learn *vivâ voce* from Edmund Kean how he produced his great effects. To be the object and subject of a private sermon from this Methodist enthusiast (for Diamond could conceive no other

reason for the preacher's desiring an interview with him than zeal for converting) was, however, a different matter; and Diamond had half a mind to decline the private communication. He was a man peculiarly averse to outspokenness about his own feelings. Nor was he given to be frank and diffusive on topics of mere intellectual speculation; although, occasionally, he could exchange thoughts on such matters with a congenial mind. But he knew well enough that, with the Methodists in general, an excited state of feeling, which might do duty for conviction, was the aim and end of their teaching and preaching.

"This man is ignorant and enthusiastic, and will make himself absurd and me uncomfortable, and I shall have to offend him, which I don't wish to do," thought Mr. Diamond, standing stiff and grave with the candle in his hand. But once more the sight of Powell's haggard, suffering face and bright wistful eyes touched him; and once more the resolute Matthew Diamond suffered himself to be swayed by an impulse of sympathy with this man.

"Oh," said he, "well, you can come into my sitting-room."

The invitation was not very graciously given, but Powell did not seem to heed that at all. Mrs. Thimbleby stood in admiring astonishment as her two lodgers left the kitchen together.

The two young men, so strangely contrasted in all outward circumstances, entered the small parlour, which served as dining-room, sitting-room, and study to Matthew Diamond, and seated themselves at a table almost covered with books, one corner of which had been cleared to admit of a little tea-tray being placed upon it.

"Will you share my tea, Mr. Powell?" asked Diamond, as he filled a cup with the strong brown liquid.

"No; I thank you for proffering it to me, but I do not drink tea."

"I am sorry for that, for I am afraid I have no other refreshment to offer you. I don't indulge in wine or spirits."

Diamond threw into his manner a certain determined commonplaceness, as though to quench any tendency to excitement or exaltation which might show itself in the preacher. Although he would have expressed it in different terms, Matthew Diamond had at the bottom of his mind a feeling akin to that in Miss Chubb's, when she declared her dread of the Maxfield family "going into convulsions" in the parish church of St. Chad.

"I will take a cup of tea myself, if you have no objection," said Diamond, suiting the action to the word, and stretching out his legs, so as to bring them within reach of the warmth from the

fire. "Won't you draw nearer to the hearth, Mr. Powell?"

Powell sat looking fixedly into the fire with an abstracted air. His hands were joined loosely, and rested on his knees. The firelight shone on his wan, clearly-cut face, but seemed to be absorbed and quenched in the blackness of his hair, which hung down in two straight, thick locks behind his ears. He did not accept Mr. Diamond's invitation to draw nearer to the warm hearth, but, after a pause, turned his face to his companion, and said, "It is on behalf of the young maiden, Rhoda Maxfield, that I would speak with you, sir."

He could scarcely have said anything more thoroughly unexpected and disconcerting to Matthew Diamond. The latter did not start or stare, or make any strong demonstration of surprise, but he could not help a sudden flush mounting to his face, much to his annoyance.

"About Miss Rhoda Maxfield?" he returned coldly; "I do not understand what concern either you or I can have with any private conversation about that young lady."

"My concern with Rhoda is that of one who has had it laid upon him to lead a tender soul out of the darkness into the light, and who suddenly finds himself divided from that precious

charge, even at the moment when he hoped the goal was reached. Her father has left our Society, and has thus carried Rhoda away from the reach of my exhortations."

"By Jove!" thought Diamond to himself, as he turned his keen grey eyes on the preacher, "this is a specimen of spiritual conceit on a colossal scale!" Then he said aloud, "You must console yourself with the hope that the exhortations she will hear in the parish church will differ from your own rather in manner than matter, Mr. Powell. There really are some very decent people among the congregation of St. Chad's."

"Nay," answered Powell, with simple gentleness, "do you think I doubt it? It has been the boast of Methodism that it receives into its bosom all denominations of Christians, without distinction. The Churchman and the Dissenter, the Presbyterian and the Independent, are alike welcome to us, and are free alike to follow their own method of worship. In the words of John Wesley himself, 'one condition, and one only, is required—a real desire to save their souls. Where this is, it is enough; they desire no more. They lay stress upon nothing else. They ask only, Is thy heart herein as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand.'"

"Methodism has changed somewhat since the days of John Wesley," said Diamond, drily.

"Not Methodism, but perhaps—Methodists. But it was not of Methodism that I had it on my mind to speak to you now."

Diamond controlled his face and his attitude to express civil indifference; but—his pulse was quickened, and he hid his mouth with his hand. Powell went on: "I have turned the matter in my mind, many ways. And I have sought for guidance on it with much wrestling of the spirit. But I had not received a clear leading until this evening. When I saw you standing in the doorway, it was borne in upon me that you could be an instrument of help in this matter. And the leading was the more assured to me, because that to-day, having opened my Bible after due supplication, mine eyes fell at once on the words, 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eyes seeth thee.' Now these words were dark to me until just now, when you seemed to appear as the explanation and interpretation thereof."

Diamond could not but acknowledge to himself that all the scriptural phraseology, and the technicalities of sectarianism, which he found merely grotesque or disgusting in men of common, vulgar natures, came from this man's lips with as much ease and propriety as if he had been a Hebrew of old time uttering his native idiom. Indeed, the impression of there being something oriental

about David Powell, which Diamond had received on first seeing him, was deepened on further acquaintance. This black-haired Welshman was picturesque and poetic, despite his threadbare cloth suit, made in the ungraceful mode of the day; and impressive, despite his equally threadbare phrases. It is possible to make a wonderful difference in the effect both of clothes and words, by putting something earnest and unaffected inside them.

"What is the help you seek? And how can I help you?" asked Diamond, with grave directness.

"You are acquainted with the daughter of the principal of the grammar school here——"

"Miss Bodkin?"

"Yes. Do you think that, if you carried to her a request that I might be permitted to see and speak with her, she would admit me?"

"I—I don't know," answered Diamond, greatly taken aback.

There was a pause. Each man was busy with his own thoughts. "Rhoda is beyond my reach now," said Powell at length. "I can neither see nor speak with her. Nor do I know of any of those who see her familiarly who would be likely to influence her for good, except Miss Bodkin. I am told that she is a lady of much ability and power of mind; and I hear, moreover, of her

doing many acts of charity and kindness. You know her well, do you not?"

"I know her. Yes."

"Would you consent to carry such a request from me?"

Diamond hesitated. "Why not prefer the request yourself?" he said. "If you have any good reason for desiring an interview with Miss Bodkin, I believe she would grant it."

"I had thought of doing so. I had thought, even, of writing all that I have to say. But, for many reasons, I believe it would be more profitable for me to see her face to face. I am no penman. I am indeed, as you perceive, a man very ignorant in the world's learning and the world's ways."

Diamond suspected a covert boast under this humble speech, and answered in his coolest tones, "The first is a disadvantage—or an advantage, as you choose to consider it—which you share with a good many of your brethren, Mr. Powell. As to the latter kind of ignorance — Methodists are generally thought to have worldly wisdom enough for their needs."

Powell bent his head. "I would fain have more learning," he said in a low voice, "but only as a means, not as an end—not as an end."

"But," said Diamond, in a constrained voice, "it seems to me hardly worth while to trouble Miss Bodkin, by asking for an interview on any

such grounds. Since you are charitable enough to believe that Miss Maxfield's spiritual welfare is not imperilled by going to St. Chad's, I don't see what need there is for you to be uneasy about her!"

"I am uneasy; but not for the reasons you suppose. Rhoda is very guileless, and I would shield her from peril."

Diamond looked at the preacher sternly. "I don't understand you," he said. "And to say the truth, Mr. Powell, I disapprove of meddling in other people's affairs. Miss Maxfield is a young lady for whom I have the very highest respect."

For the first time a flame of quick anger flashed from Powell's dark eyes, as he answered, "Your high respect would teach you to stand aside and let the innocent maiden pine under a delusion which might spoil her life and peril her soul; mine prompts me to step forward and awaken her to the truth, never heeding what figure I make in the matter."

The sudden passion in the man's face and figure was like a material illumination. Diamond had grown pale, and looked at him attentively, and in silence.

"Do you think," proceeded Powell, his thin hands working nervously, and his eyes blazing, "that I do not understand how pure a creature she is—how innocent, confiding, and devoid of all sus-

picion of guile? Yea, and even, therefore, the more in need of warning! But because I am a man still young in years, and neither the maiden's brother, nor any kin to her, I must stand silent and withhold my help, lest the world should say I am transgressing its rules, and bid me mind my own affairs, or deride me for a fanatical fool! Do you think I do not foresee all this? or do you think that, foreseeing it, I heed it? I have broken harder bonds than that; I have fought with strong impulses, to which such motives are as cobwebs——" Then, with a sudden check and change of tone which a grain of affectation would have sufficed to render ludicrous, but which, in its simplicity, was almost touching, he added, in a low voice, "I ask pardon for my vehemence; I speak too much of myself. I have had some suffering in this matter, and am not always able to control my words. I have had strange visitings of the old Adam of late. It is only by much striving after grace, and by strong wrestling in prayer, that I have not wandered utterly from the right way."

He had risen from his chair at the beginning of his speech, and now sank down again on it wearily, with drooping head.

Matthew Diamond sat and looked at him still with the same earnest attention; but blended, now, with a look of compassion. He was thinking to himself what must be the force of enthusiastic faith,

which could so subdue the fiery nature of this man, and how he must suffer in the conflict. Presently, he said aloud, "I am ready to admit, Mr. Powell, that you are actuated by conscientious motives; I am sure that you are. But your conscience cannot be a rule for all the rest of the world. Mine may counsel me differently, you know."

"Oh, sir, we are neither of us left to our own guidance, thanks be to God! There is a sure counsellor that can never fail us. I have searched diligently, and I have received a clear leading which I cannot mistrust. I do not feel free to tell you more particularly the grounds of my anxiety respecting Rhoda Maxfield. But I do assure you, with all sincerity and solemnity, that I have her welfare wholly at heart, and that I would not injure her by the least shadow of blame in the opinion of any human being."

There was silence for some minutes. Diamond leant his head on his hand, and reflected. Then at length he said, "Look here, Mr. Powell; I believe, if you had pitched on anyone else in all Whitford to speak to about Miss Rhoda Maxfield, I should have declined to assist you. But Miss Bodkin is so superior in sense and goodness to most other folks here, that I am sure whatever you may say to her confidentially will be sacred. And then, she may be able to set you right, if you are wrong. She has the woman's tact and insight which we lack.

And, besides, she is fond of Rhoda." He coloured a little as he said the name, and dropped his voice.

"You confirm all that I have heard of this lady. She is abundantly blessed with good gifts."

"Well, then, Mr. Powell, I will write to Miss Bodkin to-morrow, telling her merely that you desire to speak with her, and entreat her good offices on behalf of one who needs them."

Powell sprang up from his seat eagerly. "I thank you, sir, from a full heart," he said. "You are doing a good action. Farewell."

Diamond held out his hand, which the preacher grasped in his own. The two hands were as strongly contrasted as the owners of them. Diamond's was broad, muscular, and yet smooth—a strong young hand, full of latent power. Powell's was slender, nervous, showing the corded veins, and with long emaciated fingers. It, too, indicated force; but force of a different kind. The one hand might have driven a plough, or written out a mathematical problem; the other might have wielded a scimitar in the service of the Prophet, or held up a crucifix in the midst of persecuting savages. As they stood for a second thus hand in hand, Powell's mouth broke into a wonderfully sweet and radiant smile, and he said, "You see, sir, I was right to have faith in my counsellor. You have helped me."

Diamond sat musing late that night, and was roused by the cold to find his fire gone out and

his watch marking half-past twelve o'clock. "I wonder," he thought to himself, "if Powell has any foundation for his hints, and if any scoundrel is playing false with her. If there be, I should like to shoot him like a dog!"

CHAPTER XV.

Minnie and her father had been having a discussion about David Powell, and the discussion had heated Dr. Bodkin, and spoiled his half hour after dinner, which was wont to be the pleasantest half hour of his day. For Dr. Bodkin did not sit over his wine alone. When there were no guests, his wife and Minnie remained at the black shining board—in those days the table-cloth was removed for the dessert, and the polish of the mahogany beneath it was a matter of pride with notable housekeepers like Mrs. Bodkin—and his wife poured out his allowance of port and peeled his walnuts for him, and his daughter chatted with him, and coaxed him, and sometimes contradicted him a little, and there would be no more school until to-morrow morning, and altogether the doctor was accustomed to enjoy himself. But on this occasion the poor gentleman was vexed and disturbed.

"It's a parcel of stuff and nonsense!" said the doctor, jerking his legs under the table.

"That remains to be proved, papa. If the man has anything of consequence to say, I shall soon discover it."

"Anything of consequence to say? Fudge! He is coming begging, perhaps——"

"I don't believe that, papa. Nor, I think, do you in your heart," returned Minnie, with a little smile at one side of her mouth.

But the doctor was too much disturbed to smile. "Why shouldn't he come begging? It won't be his modesty that will stand in his way, I daresay. Or perhaps he wants to 'convert' you, as these fellows are pleased to call it!"

"Nobody seems to be afraid of our wanting to convert him!" said Minnie.

"I don't like the sort of thing. I don't like that people should have it to say that my daughter is honoured with the confidences of a parcel of ranting, canting cobblers."

"But, papa, would it not—I am speaking in sober sincerity, and because I really do want your serious answer—don't you think it would be wrong to be deterred from helping anyone with a kind word or a kind deed, by the fear of people saying this or that?"

"Helping a fiddlestick!" cried Dr. Bodkin magisterially, but incoherently.

Minnie's face fell. It had been paler than usual of late, and she had been suffering and feeble. She

never lamented aloud, nor was importunate, nor even showed weakness of temper; but her father, who loved her very tenderly, understood the chill look of disappointment well enough, and it was more than he had strength to bear.

"Of course the man can come and say his say," he added, jerking his legs again impatiently under the sheltering mahogany, "especially as you say he is going away from Whitford directly."

"Yes; but there is no guarantee that he will not come back again. I cannot promise you that, on his behalf."

This unflinching straightforwardness of Minnie's was a fertile source of trouble between her father and herself.

It was certainly rather hard on the doctor to be forced to surrender absolutely, without any of those pleasant pretences which are equivalent to the honours of war. Fortunately—we are limiting ourselves to the doctor's point of view—fortunately at this moment his eye fell on Mrs. Bodkin, who, made exquisitely nervous by any collision between the two great forces that ruled her life, was pushing the decanter of port backwards and forwards on the slippery table, quite unconscious of that mechanical movement.

"Laura, what the——mischief are you about? Do you think I want my wine shaken up like a dose of physic?"

This kind of diversion of the vials of the doctor's wrath on to his wife's devoted head was no uncommon finale to any altercation in which the reverend gentleman happened not to be getting altogether the best of it.

"I think," said Mrs. Bodkin, speaking very quickly, and in a low tone, as was her wont, "that very likely Mr. Powell wants to interest Minnie on behalf of Richard Gibbs."

"And who, pray, if I may venture to inquire, is Richard Gibbs?" asked the doctor, in his most awful grammar-school manner, and with a sarcastic severity in his eye, as he uttered the name 'Gibbs,' and looked at Mrs. Bodkin as though he expected her to be very much ashamed of herself.

"Brother of Jane, our maid. He is a groom at Pudcombe Hall, and a Wesleyan. Mr. Powell may want to recommend him, or get him a place."

"What, is the fellow going to leave Pudcombe Hall, then?"

"Not that I know of exactly. But it struck me it might be about Richard Gibbs that he wanted to speak, because Gibbs is a Wesleyan, you know."

"I suppose he wants to meddle and make himself of consequence in some way. Egotism and conceit—rampant conceit—are the mainsprings that move such fellows as this Powell."

The doctor rose majestically from the table and walked towards the door. There he paused, and turning round said to his wife, "May I request, Laura, that somebody shall take care that I get a cup of hot tea sent to me in the study? I don't think it is much to request that my tea shall not be brought to me in a tepid state!"

Mrs. Bodkin had a great gift of holding her tongue on occasions. She held it now, and the doctor left the room with dignity.

That evening Minnie wrote the following note:—

"My dear Mr. Diamond,—I shall be able to see Mr. Powell at one o'clock to-morrow. Should that hour not suit his convenience, perhaps he will do me the favour to let me know.

"Yours very truly,

"M. Bodkin."

It was the first time she had ever written to Mr. Diamond. The temptation to make her letter longer than was absolutely needful had been resisted. But the consciousness that the temptation had existed, and been overcome, was present to Minnie's mind; and she curled her lip in self-scorn as she thought, "If I wrote him whole pages it would only bore him. He would prefer one line written in Rhoda's school-girl hand, out of Rhoda's school-girl head, to

the best wit I could give him; aye, or to the best wit of a wittier woman than I." Then suddenly she tore the note she had just written across, threw it into the fire, and watched it blaze and smoulder into blackness. "I will ask you to write a line for me, mamma," she said, when Mrs. Bodkin re-entered the drawing-room, after having sent in the doctor's cup of tea to the study.

"To whom, Minnie?"

"To Mr. Diamond. Please say that I will receive Mr. Powell at one o'clock to-morrow, if that suits him."

"I daresay it is really about Richard Gibbs," said Mrs. Bodkin, as she sealed her note.

It was not without a slight feeling of nervousness that Minnie Bodkin, the next day, heard Jane's announcement, "Mr. Powell is below, Miss. Mistress wishes to know if you would see him in your own room?"

Minnie gave orders that the preacher should be shown upstairs, and Jane ushered him in very respectfully. Dr. Bodkin's old man-servant took no pains to hide his disgust at the reception of such a guest; and declared in the servants' hall that the sight of one of them long-haired, canting Methodys fairly turned his stomach. But Jane, remembering her brother Richard's reformation, was less militant in her orthodoxy, and expressed the opinion that "Mr. Powell was a very good man for all his long

hair"—a revolutionary sentiment which was naturally received with incredulity and contempt.

Minnie looked up eagerly when the preacher entered the room, and scanned him with a rapid glance as she asked him to be seated. "I am a poor feeble creature, Mr. Powell," she said, "who cannot move about at my own will. So you wil forgive my bringing you up here, will you not?"

Powell, on his part, looked at the young lady with a steady, searching gaze. Minnie was accustomed to be looked at admiringly, affectionately, deferentially, curiously, pityingly (which she liked least of all)—sometimes spitefully. But she had never been looked at as David Powell was looking at her now; that is, as if his spirit were scrutinising her spirit, altogether regardless of the form which housed it.

"I thank you gratefully for letting me have speech of you," he said; and his voice, as he said it, charmed Minnie's sensitive and fastidious ear.

"Do you know, Mr. Powell, that for some time past I have had the wish to make your acquaintance? But circumstances seemed to make it unlikely that I ever should do so."

"Yes; it was very unlikely, humanly speaking. But I have no doubt that our meeting has been brought about in direct answer to prayer."

Minnie was at a loss what to say. It was almost as startling to hear a man profess such a

belief on a week-day, and in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, as it would have been to find Madame Malibran conducting all her conversation in recitative, or to hear Mr. Dockett begin his sentences with a "whereas."

"You wish to speak to me on behalf of some one, Mr. Diamond tells me?" said Minnie, after a slight hesitation.

"Yes; you have been kind and gracious to a young girl beneath you in worldly station, named Rhoda Maxfield."

"Rhoda! Is it of her you wish to speak?" cried Minnie, in great surprise. She felt a strange sick pang of jealousy. It was for Rhoda's sake, then, that Mr. Diamond had begged her to receive Powell!

"You are kindly disposed towards the maiden?" said Powell, anxiously; for Minnie's change of countenance had not escaped him. For her life, Minnie could not cordially have said "yes" at that moment.

"I—Rhoda is a very good girl, I believe; what would you have me do for her?"

"I would have you dissuade her from resting her hopes—I speak now merely of earthly hopes and earthly prudence—on the attachment of one who is unstable, vain, and worldly-minded."

"What do you mean? I—I do not understand," stammered Minnie, with fast-beating heart.

"May I speak to you in full confidence? If you tell me I may do so, I shall trust you utterly."

"What is this matter to me? Why do you come to me about it?"

"Because I have been told by those whose words I believe, that you are gifted with a clear and strong judgment, as well as with all qualities that win love."

"You are mistaken. I am not gifted with the qualities that win love," said Minnie, bitterly. Then she asked, abruptly, "Did Mr. Diamond advise you to speak to me about Rhoda?"

"Nay; it was I who had recourse to his intercession to get speech of you."

"But he knows your errand?"

"In part he knows it. But I was not free to say to him all that I would fain say to you."

Minnie's face had a hard set look. "Well," she said, after a short silence, "I cannot refuse to hear you. But I warn you that I do not believe I can do any good in the matter."

"That will be overruled as the Lord wills."

Then David Powell proceeded to set forth his fears and anxieties about Rhoda, more fully and clearly than he had done to Diamond. He declared his conviction that the girl was deceived by false hopes, and was fretting and pining because every now and then misgivings assailed her which she could not confess to any one, and because that her

conscience was uneasy. "The maiden is very guileless and tender-natured," said Powell, softly.

"Don't you think you a little exaggerate her tenderness, Mr. Powell? Persons capable of strong feelings themselves are apt to attribute all sorts of sentiments to very wooden-hearted creatures."

He looked at her earnestly, and shook his head.

"Rhoda always seems to me to be rather phlegmatic; very gentle and pretty, of course. But, do you know, I should not be afraid of her breaking her heart."

There was a hard tone in Minnie's voice, and a hard expression about her mouth, which hurt and disappointed the preacher. He had expected some warmth of sympathy, some word of affection for Rhoda.

"You do not know her," he said sadly.

"And then, Mr. Powell, Algernon Errington ——you know, I suppose, that Mr. Errington is a great friend of mine?"

"I will not willingly say aught to offend you, nor to offend against Christian courtesy. But there are higher duties—more solemn promptings—that must not be resisted."

"Oh, I am not offended. But, let me ask you, what right have we to assume that Mr. Errington has ever deceived Rhoda, or has ever thought of her otherwise than as the friend and playmate of his childhood?"

"I am convinced that he has led her to believe he means, some day, to marry her. I cannot resist that conviction."

"Marry her! Why, Mr. Powell, the thing is absurd on the face of it. A boy of nineteen, and in Algernon's position!—why, any person of common sense would understand that such an idea could not be looked at seriously."

Powell made himself some silent reproaches for his want of faith. This lady might not be soft and sweet; but she had evidently the clear judgment which he sought for to help Rhoda. And yet he had been discouraged, and had almost distrusted his "leading," because of a little coldness of manner. He answered Minnie eagerly:

"It is true! I well know that what you say is true; but will you tell Rhoda this? Will you plentifully declare to her the thing as it is?"

"Rhoda has her father to advise her, if she needs advice."

"Nay; her father is no adviser for her in this matter. He is an ignorant man. He does not understand the ways of the world—at least, not of that world in which the Erringtons hold a place—and he is prejudiced and stiff-necked."

There was a short silence. Then Minnie said:

"I do not see how I can interfere. I should, in fact, be taking an unjustifiable liberty, and—Mr. Errington is going away. They will both forget all

about this boy-and-girl nonsense, if people have the wisdom to let it alone."

"Rhoda will not forget; she will brood silently over her secret feelings, and her thoughts will be diverted from higher things. She will fall away into outer darkness. Oh think, a word in season, how good it is! Consider that you may save a perishing soul by speaking that word. I have prayed that I might leave behind me in this place the assurance that this lamb should not be utterly lost out of the fold."

Powell had risen to his feet in his excitement, and walked away from Minnie towards the window, with his head bent, and his hands clasping his forehead. Minnie felt something like repulsion, and the sort of shame which an honest and proud nature feels at any suspicion of histrionism in one whom it has hitherto respected. Surely the man was exaggerating—consciously exaggerating—his feeling on this matter! But, then, Powell turned, and came back towards her; and she saw his face clearly in the full sunlight, and instantly her suspicion vanished. That face was wan and haggard with suffering, and there was a strange brilliancy in the eyes, almost like the brightness of latent tears. The tears sprang sympathetically to her own eyes as she looked at him. It was impossible to resist the pathos of that face. There was a strange appealing expression in it, as of a suffering

of which the sufferer was only half-conscious, that went straight to Minnie's heart.

"Mr. Powell, I am so truly sorry to see you distressed! I wish—I really do wish—that I could do anything for you!"

"For me! Oh not for me! But stretch out your hands to this poor maiden, and say words of counsel to her, and of kindness, as one woman may say them to another. I have borne the burden of that young soul; I have had it laid upon me to wrestle strongly for her in prayer; I have—have been assailed with manifold troubles and temptations concerning her. But I am clear now. I speak with a single mind, and as desiring her higher welfare from the depths of my heart."

"Good Heaven!" thought Minnie, "what a tragic thing it is to see men pouring out all the treasures of their love on a thing like this girl!" For something in Powell's face and voice had pierced her mind with a lightning-swift conviction that he loved Rhoda Maxfield. Minnie would have died rather than utter such a speech aloud. The ridicule which, among sophisticated persons, slinks on the heels of all strongly-expressed emotion, was too present to her mind, and too disgusting to her pride, for her to have risked the utterance of such a speech even to her mother. But there in her mind the words were, "Good Heaven; how tragic it is!" And she acknowledged to herself, at the

same time, that Powell's lack of sophistication and intensity of fervour raised him into a sphere wherein ridicule had no place.

"I will do what I can, Mr. Powell," said Minnie, after a pause, looking with unspeakable pity at his thin, pallid face. "But do not trust too much to my influence."

"I do trust to it, because it will be strengthened and supported by my prayers."

Then, when he had said farewell, and was about to go away, she was suddenly moved by a mixture of feelings, and, as it were, almost against her will, to say to him, "How good it would be for you to see Rhoda as she is! A shallow, sweet, poor little nature, as incapable of appreciating your love as a wren or a lady-bird! I like Rhoda, and I am a poor, shallow creature in many ways myself. But I do recognise things higher than myself when I see them."

David Powell's face grew crimson with a hot, dark flush, and for an instant he grasped the back of a chair near him, like a man who reels in drunkenness. Then he said, "You are very keen to see the truth. You have seen it. Rhoda is dear to me, as no woman ever has been dear, or will be again. Once I thought this love was a snare to me. Now—unless in moments of temptation by the enemy—I know that it is an

instrument in God's hands. It has given me strength to pray, courage to ask you for your help."

"But you suffer!" cried Minnie, looking at him with knit, earnest brows. "Why should you suffer for one who does not care for you? It is not just."

"Who dare ask for justice? I have received mercy—abundant, overflowing mercy—and shall I not render mercy in my poor degree? But in truth," he added, in a low voice, and with a smile which Minnie thought the most strangely sweet she had ever seen—"in truth, I cannot claim that merit. I can no more help desiring to do good to Rhoda than I can help drawing my breath. Of others I may say, 'It is my duty to assist this man, to counsel that one, to endure some hard treatment for the sake of this other, in order that I may lead them to Christ.' But with Rhoda there is no sense of sacrifice. I believe that the Lord has appointed me to bring her to Him. If my feet be cut and bleeding by the way, I cannot heed it."

"Would you be glad to see Rhoda married to Algernon Errington if he were to become a religious, earnest man—such a man as your conscientious judgment must approve?" asked Minnie.

And the minute the words had passed her lips she repented having said them; they seemed so

needlessly cruel; such a ruthless probing of a tender, quivering soul. "It was as if the devil had put the words into my mouth," said she afterwards to herself.

But Powell answered very quietly, "I have thought of that often. But I ask myself such questions no longer. I hold my Father's hand even as a little child, and whither that hand leads me I shall go safely. It is not for me to tempt the wrath of the Lord by vain surmises and putting a case. 'Yea, though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.'"

"You will come back to Whitford, will you not?" asked Minnie.

"If I may. But I know not when. That is not given me to decide. At present, I feel my conscience in bonds of obedience to the Society."

"Perhaps we may never meet again in this world!" Minnie, as she said the words, was conscious of a strong fellow-feeling for this man, so far removed from her in external circumstances.

"May God bless you!" he said, almost in a whisper.

Minnie held out her hand. As he took it lightly in his own for an instant, he pointed upward with the other hand, and then turned and went away in silence.

When Dr. Bodkin said a word or two to Minnie that evening, as to her interview with the "rant-

ing, canting cobbler," she was very reticent and brief in her answers. But on her father shrugging his shoulders disparagingly and observing, "It is a good thing that this firebrand is taking his departure from Whitford. I've been hearing all sorts of things about him to-day. It seems the fellow even set the Methodists by the ears among themselves," she exclaimed hotly, "I do declare most solemnly that this man gives me a more vivid idea of a saint upon earth—a stumbling, striving, suffering saint—than anything I ever saw or read."

CHAPTER XVI.

Arrived in London, with an influential patron ready to receive him, and twenty pounds in his pocket, over and above the sum his mother had contrived to spare out of her quarter's income, Algernon Errington considered himself to be a very lucky fellow. He had good health, good spirits, good looks, and a disposition to make the most of them, untrammelled by shyness or scruples.

He did feel a little nervous as he drove, the day after his arrival in town, to Lord Seely's house, but by no means painfully so. He was undeniably anxious to make a good impression. But his experience, so far, led him to assume, almost with certainty, that he should succeed in doing so.

The hackney-coach stopped at the door of a grimy-looking mansion in Mayfair, but it was a stately mansion withal. In reply to Algernon's

inquiry whether Lord Seely was at home, a solemn servant said that his lordship was at home, but was usually engaged at that hour. "Will you carry in my card to him?" said Algernon. "Mr. Ancram Errington."

Algy felt that he had made a false move in coming without any previous announcement, and in dismissing his cab, when he was shown into a little closet off the hall, lined with dingy books, and containing only two hard horsehair chairs, to await the servant's return. There was something a little flat and ignominious in this his first appearance in the Seely house, waiting like a dun or an errand-boy, with the possibility of having to walk out again, without having been admitted to the light of my lord's countenance. However, within a reasonable time, the solemn footman returned, and asked him to walk upstairs, as my lady would receive him, although my lord was for the present engaged.

Algernon followed the man up a softly-carpeted staircase, and through one or two handsome drawing-rooms—a little dim from the narrowness of the street and the heaviness of the curtains—into a small cosy boudoir. There was a good fire on the hearth, and in an easy-chair on one side of it sat a fat lady, with a fat lap-dog on her knees. The lady, as soon as she saw Algernon, waved a

jewelled hand to keep him off, and said, in a mellow, pleasant voice, which reminded him of his mother's, "How d'ye do? Don't shake hands, nor come too near, because Fido don't like it, and he bites strangers if he sees them touch me. Sit down."

Algernon had made a very agile backward movement on the announcement of Fido's infirmity of temper; but he bowed, smiled, and seated himself at a respectful distance opposite to my lady. Lady Seely's appearance certainly justified Mrs. Errington's frequent assertion that there was a strong family likeness throughout all branches of the Ancram stock, for she bore a considerable resemblance to Mrs. Errington herself, and a still stronger resemblance to a miniature of Mrs. Errington's grandfather, which Algy had often seen. My lady was some ten years older than Mrs. Errington. She wore a blonde wig, and was rouged. But her wig and her rouge belonged to the candid and ingenuous species of embellishment. Each proclaimed aloud, as it were, "I am wig!" "I am paint!" with scarcely an attempt at deception.

"So you've come to town," said my lady, fumbling for her eye-glass with one hand, while with the other she patted and soothed the growling Fido. Having found the eye-glass, she looked

steadily through it at Algernon, who bore the scrutiny with a good-humoured smile and a little blush, which became him very well.

"You're very nice-looking, indeed," said my lady.

Algy could not find a suitable reply to this speech, so he only smiled still more, and made a half-jesting little bow.

"Let me see," pursued Lady Seely, still holding her glass to her eyes, "what is our exact relationship? You are a relation of mine, you know."

"I am glad to say I have that honour."

"I don't suppose you know much of the family genealogy," said my lady, who prided herself on her own accurate knowledge of such matters. "My grandfather and your mother's grandfather were brothers. Your mother's grandfather was the elder brother. He had a very pretty estate in Warwickshire, and squandered it all in less than twelve years. I don't suppose your mother's father had a penny to bless himself with when he came of age."

"I daresay not, ma'am."

"My grandfather did better. He went to India when he was seventeen, and came back when he was seventy, with a pot of money. Ah, if my father hadn't been the youngest of five brothers, I should have been a rich woman!"

"Your ladyship's grandfather was General

Cloudesley Ancram, who distinguished himself at the siege of Khallaka," said Algernon.

Lady Seely nodded approvingly. "Ah, your mother has taught you that, has she?" she said. "And what was your father? Wasn't he an apothecary?"

Algernon's face showed no trace of annoyance, except a little increase of colour in his blooming young cheeks, as he answered, "The fact is, Lady Seely, that my poor father was an enthusiast about science. He would study medicine, instead of going into the Church, and availing himself of the family interest. The consequence was, that he died a poor M.D. instead of a rich D.D.—or even, who knows? a bishop!"

"La!" said my lady, shortly. Then, after a minute's pause, she added, "Then, I suppose, you're not very rich, hey?"

"I am as poor, ma'am, as my grandfather, Montagu Ancram, of whom your ladyship was saying just now that he had not a penny to bless himself with when he came of age," returned Algernon, laughing.

"Well, you seem to take it very easy," said my lady. And once more she looked at him through her eye-glass. "And what made you come to town, all the way from what-d'ye-call-it? Have you got anything to do?"

"N—nothing definite, exactly," said Algernon.

"H'm! Quiet, Fido!"

"I ventured to hope that Lord Seely—that perhaps my lord—might——"

"Oh, dear, you mustn't run away with that idea!" exclaimed her ladyship. "There ain't the least chance of my lord being able to do anything for you. He's torn to pieces by people wanting places, and all sorts of things."

"I was about to say that I ventured to hope that my lord would kindly give me some advice," said Algernon. As he said it his heart was like lead. He had not, of course, expected to be at once made Secretary of State, or even to pop immediately into a clerkship at the Foreign Office. He had put the matter very soberly and moderately before his own mind, as he thought. He had told himself that a word of encouragement from his high and mighty cousin should be thankfully received, and that he would neither be pushing nor impatient, accepting a very small beginning cheerfully. But it had never occurred to him to prepare himself for an absolute flat refusal of all assistance. My lady's tone was one of complete decision. And it was in vain he reflected that my lady might be speaking more harshly and decisively than she had any warrant for doing, being led to that course by the necessity of protecting herself and her husband

against importunity. None the less was his heart very heavy within him. And he really deserved some credit for gallantry in bearing up against the blow.

"Advice!" said my lady, echoing his word. "Oh, well, that ain't so difficult. What are you fit for?"

"Perhaps I am scarcely the best judge of that, am I?" returned Algernon, with that childlike raising of the eyebrows which gave so winning an expression to his face.

"Perhaps not; but what do you think?"

"Well, I—I believe I could fill the post of secretary, or—— What I should like," he went on, in a sudden burst of candour, and looking deprecatingly at Lady Seely, like a child asking for sugar-plums, "would be to get attached to one of our foreign legations."

"I daresay! But that's easier said than done. And as to being a secretary, it's precious hard work, I can tell you, if you're paid for it; and, of course, no post would suit you that didn't pay."

"I shouldn't mind hard work."

"You wouldn't be much of an Ancram if you liked it; I can tell you I know that much! Well, and how long do you mean to stay in town?"

"That is quite uncertain."

"You must come and see me again before you go, and be introduced to Lord Seely."

"Oh, indeed, I hope so."

Come and see her again before he went! What would his mother say, what would his Whitford friends say, if they could hear that speech? Nevertheless, he answered very cheerfully:

"Oh, indeed, I hope so!" And interpreting my lady's words as a dismissal, rose to go.

"You're really uncommonly nice-looking," said Lady Seely, observing his straight, slight figure, and his neatly-shod feet as he stood before her. "Oh, you needn't look shame-faced about it. It's no merit of yours; but it's a great thing, let me tell you, for a young fellow without a penny to have an agreeable appearance. How old are you?"

"Twenty," said Algernon, anticipating his birthday by two months.

"Do you know, I think Fido will like you!" said my lady, who observed the fact that her favourite had neither barked nor growled when Algernon rose from his chair. "I'm sure I hope he will; he is so unpleasant when he takes a dislike to people."

Algernon thought so too; but he merely said, "Oh, we shall be great friends, I daresay; I always get on with dogs."

"Ah, but Fido is peculiar. You can't coax him

and he gets so much to eat that you can't bribe him. If he likes you, he likes you—*voilà tout!* By-the-way, do you understand French?"

"Yes; pretty fairly. I like it."

"Do you? But, as to your accent—I'm afraid that cannot be much to boast of. English provincial French is always so very dreadful."

"Well, I don't know," said Algernon, with perfect good humour, for he believed himself to be on safe ground here; "but the old Duc de Villegagnon, an *émigré*, who was my master, used to say that I did not pronounce the words of my little French songs so badly."

"Bless the boy! Can you sing French songs? Do sit down, then, at the piano, and let me hear one! Never mind Fido." (Her ladyship had set her favourite on the floor, and he was sniffing at Algernon's legs.) "He don't dislike music, except a brass band. Sit down, now!"

Algernon obeyed, seated himself at the pianoforte, and began to run his fingers over the keys. He found the instrument a good deal out of tune; but began, after a minute's pause, a forgotten chansonette, from "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge." He sang with taste and spirit, though little voice; and his French accent proved to be so surprisingly good, as to elicit unqualified approbation from Lady Seely.

"Why, I declare that's charming!" she cried, clapping her hands. "How on earth did you pick up all that in—what's-its-name? Do look here, my lord, here's young Ancram come up from that place in the West of England, and he can play the piano and sing French songs delightfully!"

Algernon jumped up in a little flurry, and, turning round, found himself face to face with his magnificent relative, Lord Seely.

Now it must be owned that "magnificent" was not quite the epithet that could justly be applied to Lord Seely's personal appearance. He was a small, delicately-made man, with a small, delicately-featured face, and sharp, restless dark eyes. His grey hair stood up in two tufts, one above each ear, and the top of his head was bald, shining, and yellowish, like old ivory. "Eh?" said he. "Oh! Mr.—a—a, how d'ye do?" Then he shook hands with Algernon, and courteously motioning him to resume his seat, threw himself into a chair by the hearth, opposite to his wife. He stretched out his short legs to their utmost possible length before him, and leant his head back wearily.

"Tired, my lord?" asked his wife.

"Why, yes, a little. Dictating letters is a fatiguing business, Mr.—a—a—"

"Errington, my lord; Ancram Errington."

"Oh, to be sure! I'm very glad to see you;

very glad indeed. Yes, yes; Mr. Errington. You are a cousin of my lady's? Of course. Very glad."

And Lord Seely got up and shook hands once more with Algernon, whose identity he had evidently only just recognised. But, although tardy, the peer's greeting was more than civil, it was kind; and Algernon's gratitude was in direct proportion to the chill disappointment he had felt at Lady Seely's discouraging words.

"Thank you, sir," he said, pressing the small thin white hand that was proffered to him. And Algy's way of saying "Thank you, sir," was admirable, and would have made the fortune of a young actor on the stage; for, in saying it, he had sufficient real emotion to make the simulated emotion quite touching—as an actor should have.

My lord sat down again, wearily. "Bush has been with me again about that emigration scheme of his," he said to his wife. "Upon my honour, I don't know a more trying person than Bush." When he had thus spoken, he cast his eyes once more upon Algernon, who said, in the most artless, impulsive way in the world, "It's a poor-spirited kind of thing, no doubt; but, really, when one sees what a hard time of it statesmen have, one can't help feeling sometimes that it is pleasant to be nobody."

Now the word "statesman" applied to Lord Seely was scarcely more correct than the word "magnificent" applied to his outer man. The fact was, that Lord Seely had been, from his youth upward, ambitious of political distinction, and had, indeed, filled a subordinate post in the Cabinet some twenty years previous to the day on which Algernon first made his acquaintance. But he had been a mere cypher there; and the worst of it was, that he had been conscious of being a cypher. He had not strength of character or ability to dominate other men, and he had too much intelligence to flatter himself that he succeeded, where success had eluded his pursuit. Stupider men had done better for themselves in the world than Valentine Sackville Strong, Lord Seely, and had gained more solid slices of success than he. Perhaps there is nothing more detrimental to the achievement of ascendancy over others than that intermittent kind of intellect, which is easily blown into a flame by vanity, but is as easily cooled down again by the chilly suggestions of common sense. The vanity which should be able to maintain itself always at white heat would be a triumphant thing. The common sense which never flared up to an enthusiastic temperature would be a safe thing. But the alternation of the two was felt to be uncomfort-

able and disconcerting by all who had much to do with Lord Seely. He continued, however, to keep up a semblance of political life. He had many personal friends in the present ministry, and there were one or two men who were rather specially hostile to him among the Opposition; of which latter he was very proud, liking to speak of his "enemies" in the House. He spoke pretty frequently from his place among the peers, but nobody paid him any particular attention. And he wrote and printed, at his own expense, a considerable number of political pamphlets; but nobody read them. That, however, may have been due to the combination against his lordship which existed among the writers for the public press, who never, he complained, reported his speeches *in extenso*, and, with few exceptions, ignored his pamphlets altogether.

Howbeit, the word "statesman" struck pleasantly upon the little nobleman's ear, and he bestowed a more attentive glance on Algernon than he had hitherto honoured him with, and asked, in his abrupt tones, like a series of muffled barks, "Going to be long in town, Mr. Ancram?"

"I've just been asking him," interposed my lady. "He don't know for certain. But——" And here she whispered in her husband's ear.

"Oh, I hope so," said the latter aloud. "My

lady and I hope that you will do us the favour to dine with us to-morrow—eh? Oh, I beg your pardon, Belinda, I thought you said to-morrow! —on Thursday next. We shall probably be alone, but I hope you will not mind that?"

"I shall take it as a great favour, my lord," said Algernon, whose spirits had been steadily rising, ever since the successful performance of his French song.

"You know, Mr. Ancram—I mean Mr. Errington—is a cousin of mine, my lord; so he won't expect to be treated with ceremony."

Algernon felt as if he could have flown downstairs when, after this most gracious speech, he took leave of his august relatives. But he walked very soberly instead, down the staircase and past the solemn servants in the hall, with as much nonchalance as if he had been accustomed to the service of powdered lackeys from his babyhood.

"He seems an intelligent, gentleman-like young fellow," said my lord to my lady.

"Oh, he's as sharp as a weasel, and uncommonly nice-looking. And he sings French songs ever so much better than that theatre man that the Duchess made such a fuss about. He has the trick of drawing the long bow, which all the Warwickshire Ancrams were famous for. Oh, there's no doubt about his belonging to the real

breed! He told me a cock-and-a-bull story about his father's devotion to science. I believe his father was a little apothecary in Birmingham. But I don't know that that much matters," said my lady to my lord.

CHAPTER XVII.

Algernon was elated by the success of his song, and by Lady Seely's full acknowledgment of his cousinship, and he left the mansion in Mayfair in very good spirits, as has been said. But when he got back to his inn—a private hotel in a dingy street behind Oxford Street—he began to feel a recurrence of the disappointment which had oppressed him, when Lady Seely had declared so emphatically that my lord could do nothing for him, in the way of getting him a place. What was to be done? It was all very well for his mother to say that, with his talents and appearance, he must and would make his way to a high position; but, just and reasonable as it would be that his talents and appearance should give him success, he began to fear that they might not altogether avail to do so. He thought of Mr. Filthorpe—that substance, which Mr. Diamond had said they were deserting for the shadow of Seely—and of

the thousands of pounds which the Bristol merchant possessed. Truly a stool in a counting-house was not the post which Algernon coveted. And he candidly told himself that he should not be able to fill it effectively. But, still, there would have been at least as good a chance of fascinating Mr. Filthorpe as of fascinating Lord Seely, and the looked-for result of the fascination in either case was to be absolution from the necessity of doing any disagreeable work whatever. And, moreover, Mr. Filthorpe, at all events, would have supplied board and lodging and a small salary, whilst he was undergoing the progress of being fascinated.

Algernon looked thoughtful and anxious, for full a quarter of an hour, as he pondered these things. But then he fell into a fit of laughter at the recollection of Lady Seely and Fido. "There is something very absurd about that old woman," said he to himself. "She is so impudent! And why wear a wig at all, if a wig is to be such a one as hers? A turban or a skull-cap would do just as well to cover her head with. But then they wouldn't be half so funny. Fido is something like his mistress—nearly as fat, and with the same style of profile."

Then he set himself to draw a caricature representing Fido, attired after the fashion of Lady

Seely, and became quite cheerful and buoyant over it.

In the interval between the day of his visit to the Seelys and the Thursday on which he was to dine with them, Algernon made one or two calls, and delivered a couple of letters of introduction, with which his Whitford friends had furnished him. One was from Dr. Bodkin to an old-fashioned solicitor, who was reputed to be rich, but who lived in a very quiet way, in a very quiet square, and gave very quiet little dinners to a select few who could appreciate a really fine glass of port. The other letter was to a sister of young Mr. Pawkins, of Pudcombe Hall, married to the chief clerk of the Admiralty, who lived in a fashionable neighbourhood, and gave parties as fashionable as her visiting-list permitted, and by no means desired any special connoisseurship in wine on the part of her guests.

On the occasion of his first calls, Algernon found neither Mr. Leadbeater, the solicitor, nor Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs (that was the name of young Pawkins's sister) at home. So he left his letters and cards, and wandered about the streets in a rather forlorn way; for although it was his first visit to London, it was not possible for him to get much enjoyment out of the metropolis, all alone. To him every place, even London, appeared

in the light of a stage or background, whereon that supremely interesting personage, himself, might figure to more or less advantage. Now London is a big theatre. And although a big theatre full of spectators may be very exhilarating to the object of public attention who performs in it, a big theatre, practically barren of spectators —for, of course, the only real spectators are the spectators who look at *us*—is apt to oppress the mind with a sense of desertion. So he was very glad when Thursday evening came, and he found himself once more within the hall door of Lord Seely's house.

My lord was in the drawing-room alone, standing on the hearth-rug. He shook hands very kindly with Algernon, and bade him come near to the fire and warm himself, for the evening was cold.

"And what have you been doing with yourself, Mr. Errington?" asked Lord Seely.

"I have been chiefly employed to-day in losing myself and asking my way," answered Algernon, laughing. And then he began an account of his adventures, and absolutely surprised himself by the amount of fun and sparkle he contrived to elicit from the narration of circumstances which had been in fact dull and commonplace enough.

My lord was greatly amused, and once even laughed out loud at Algernon's imitation of an Irish apple-woman, who had misdirected him with the best intentions, and much calling down of blessings on his handsome face, in return for a silver sixpence.

"Capital!" said my lord, nodding his head up and down.

"The sixpence was badly invested, though," observed Algernon, "for she sent me about three miles out of my way."

"Ah, but the blarney! You forget the blessing and the blarney. Surely they were worth the money, eh?"

"No, my lord; not to me. I can't afford expensive luxuries."

Lady Seely, when she entered the room, gorgeous in pea-green satin, which singularly set off the somewhat pronounced tone of her rouge, found Algy and my lord laughing together very merrily, and, as she gave her hand to her young relative, demanded to be informed what the joke was.

Now it has been said that Algernon was possessed of wonderfully rapid powers of perception, and by sundry signs, so slight that they would have entirely escaped most observers, this clever young gentleman perceived that my lady was not altogether delighted at finding her husband and

himself on such easy and pleasant terms together. In fact, my lady, with all her blunt careless jollity of manner and pleasant mellow voice, was apt to be both jealous and suspicious. She was jealous of her ascendancy over Lord Seely, who was said by the ill-natured to be completely under his wife's thumb, and she was suspicious of most strangers —especially of strangers who might be expected to want anything of his lordship. And she usually assumed that such persons would endeavour to "come over" that nobleman, when he was apart from his wife's protecting influence. She had a general theory that "men might be humbugged into anything;" and a particular experience that Lord Seely, despite his stiff carriage and abrupt manner, was in truth far softer-natured than she was herself.

"That young scamp has been coming over Valentine with his jokes and his flummery," said my lady to herself. "He's an Ancram, every inch of him."

At that very moment Algernon was mentally declaring that the conquest of my lady would, after all, be a more difficult matter than that of my lord; but that, by some means or other, the conquest must be made, if any good was to come to him from the Seely connection. And a stream of easy chat flowed over these underlying intentions

and hid them, except that here and there, perhaps, a bubble or an eddy told of rough places out of sight.

After some ten minutes of desultory talk, my lady was obliged to own to herself that the "young scamp" had a wonderfully good manner. Without a trace of servility, he was respectful; conveying, with perfect tact, exactly the sort of homage that was graceful and becoming from a youth like himself to persons of the Seelys' age and position. Neither did he commit the error of becoming familiar, in response to Lady Seely's tone of familiarity, a pitfall which had before now entrapped the unwary. For my lady, whom Nature had created vulgar—having possibly, in the hurry of business, mistaken one kind of clay for another, and put some low person's mind into the fine porcelain of an undoubted Ancram—was fond of asserting her position in the world by a rough unceremoniousness in the first place, and a very wide-eyed arrogance in the second place, if such unceremoniousness chanced to be reciprocated by unauthorised persons.

"Do we wait for any one, Belinda?" asked Lord Seely.

"The Dormers are coming. They're such great musicians, you know. And I want Lady Harriet to hear this boy sing. And then there may be Jack Price, very likely."

"Very likely?" said my lord, raising his eyebrows and stiffening his back. "Doesn't Mr. Price do us the honour of saying positively whether he will come or not?"

"Oh, you know what Jack Price is. He says he'll come, and nine times out of ten he don't come; and then the tenth time he comes, and people have to put up with him."

My lord cleared his throat significantly, as who should say that he, at all events, did not feel inclined to put up with this system of tithes in the fulfilment of Mr. Jack Price's promises.

"If he comes," said Lady Seely, addressing Algernon, "you'll have to walk into dinner by yourself. I've only got one young lady; and, if Jack comes, he must have her."

"Where is Castalia?" asked my lord.

"Oh, I suppose she's dressing. Castalia is always the slowest creature at her toilet I ever knew."

Algernon had read up the family genealogy in the "Peerage," under his mother's instructions, sufficiently to be aware that Lord and Lady Seely were childless, having lost their only son in a boating accident years ago. "Castalia," then, could not be a daughter of the house. Who was she? A young lady who was evidently at present living with the Seelys, whom they called by her Christian name, and who was habitually a long time at her toilet!

Algernon felt a little agreeable excitement and curiosity on the subject of the tardy Castalia.

The door was thrown open. "Here she comes!" thought Algernon, settling his cravat as he threw a quick side glance at a mirror.

"General and Lady Harriet Dormer," announced the servant.

There entered a tall, elegant woman, leaning on the arm of a short, stout, benevolent-looking man in spectacles. To these personages Algernon was duly presented, being introduced, much to his gratification, by Lady Seely, as "A young cousin of mine, Mr. Ancram Errington, who has just come to town." Then, having made his bow to General Dormer, who smiled and shook hands with him, Algernon stood opposite to the graceful Lady Harriet, and was talked to very kindly and pleasantly, and felt extremely content with himself and his surroundings. Nevertheless he watched with some impatience for the appearance of "Castalia;" and forgot his usual self-possession so far as to turn his head, and break off in the middle of a sentence he was uttering to Lady Harriet, when he heard the door open again. But once more he was disappointed; for, this time, dinner was announced, and Lord Seely offered his arm to Lady Harriet and led the way out of the room.

"No Jack," said Lady Seely, as she passed out before Algernon. "And no Castalia!" said my lord over his shoulder, in a tone of vexation.

Algernon followed his seniors alone; but just as he got out on to the staircase there appeared a lady, leisurely descending from an upper floor, at whom Lord Seely looked up reproachfully.

"Late, late, Castalia!" said he, and shook his head solemnly.

"Oh no, Uncle Valentine; just in time," replied the lady.

"Castalia, take Ancram's arm, and do let us get to dinner before the soup is cold," said Lady Seely. "Give your arm to Miss Kilfinane, and come along." And her ladyship's pea-green satin swept downstairs after Lady Harriet's sober purple draperies. Algernon bowed, and offered his arm to the lady beside him; she placed her hand on it almost without looking at him, and they entered the dining-room without having exchanged a word.

The dining-room was better lighted than the staircase, and Algernon took an early opportunity of looking at his companion. She was not very young, being, in fact, nearly thirty, but looking older. Neither was she handsome. She was very thin, sallow, and sickly-looking, with a small round face, not wrinkled, but crumpled, as it were, into

queer, fretful lines. Her eyes were bright and well-shaped, but deeply sunken, and she had a great deal of thick, pale-brown hair, worn in huge bows and festoons on the top of her head, according to the extreme of the mode of that day. Her dress displayed more than it was judicious to display, in an æsthetic point of view, of very lean shoulders, and was of a bright, soft, pink hue, that would have been trying to the most blooming complexion. Altogether, the Honourable Castalia Kilfinane's appearance was disappointing, and her manner was not so attractive as to make up for lack of beauty. Her face expressed a mixture of querulousness and hauteur, and she spoke in a languid drawl, with strange peevish inflections.

"You and I ought to be some sort of relations to each other, oughtn't we?" said Algernon, having taken in all the above particulars in a series of rapid observations.

"Why?" returned the lady, without raising her eyes from her soup-plate.

"Because you are Lady Seely's niece and I am her cousin."

"Who says that I am Lady Seely's niece?"

"I thought," stammered Algernon—"I fancied —you called Lord Seely 'Uncle Valentine?'"

Even his equanimity, and a certain glow of complacency he felt at finding himself where he

was, were a little disturbed by Miss Castalia's freezing manner.

"I am Lord Seely's niece," returned she.

Then, after a little pause, having finished her soup, she leaned back in her chair and stared at Algernon, who pretended—not quite successfully—to be unconscious of her scrutiny. Apparently, the result of it was favourable to Algernon; for the lady's manner thawed perceptibly, and she began to talk to him. She had evidently heard of him from Lady Seely, and understood the exact degree of his relationship to that great lady.

"Did you ever meet the Dormers before?" asked Miss Kilfinane.

"Never. How should I? You know I am the merest country mouse. I never was in London in my life, until last Friday."

"Oh, but the Dormers don't live in town. Indeed, they are here very seldom. You might have met them; their place is in the West of England."

Algernon, after a rapid balancing of pros and cons, resolved to be absolutely candid. With his brightest smile and most arched eyebrows, he began to give Miss Kilfinane an almost unvarnished description of his life at Whitford. Almost unvarnished; but it is no more easy to tell the simple truth only occasionally, than it is to stand quite upright only occasionally. Mind and muscles will fall

back to their habitual posture. So that it may be doubted whether Miss Kilfinane received an accurate notion of the precise degree of poverty and obscurity in which the young man who was speaking to her had hitherto lived.

"And so," said she, "you have come to London to——"

"To seek my fortune," said Algernon merrily. "It is the proper and correct beginning to a story. And I think I have had a piece of good luck at the very outset by way of a good omen."

Miss Kilfinane opened her eyes interrogatively, but said nothing.

"I think it was a piece of luck for me," continued Algernon, emboldened by having secured the scornful lady's attention, and perhaps a little also by the wine he had drunk, "a great piece of good luck that Mr. Jack Price, whoever he may be, did not turn up this evening."

"Why?"

"Because, if he had, I should not have been allowed the honour of bringing you in to dinner."

"Oh yes! I should have had to go in with Jack, I suppose," answered the lady with a little smile.

"Please, Miss Kilfinane, who is Jack Price? I do so want to know!"

"Jack Price is Lord Mullingar's son."

"But what is he? And why do people want to have him so much, that they put up with his disappointing them nine times out of ten?"

"As to what he is—well, he was in the Guards, and he gave that up. Then they got him a place somewhere—in Africa, or South America, or somewhere—and he gave that up. Then he got the notion that he would be a farmer in Canada, and went out with an axe to cut down the trees, and a plough to plough the ground afterwards, and he gave that up. Now he does nothing particular."

"And has he found his vocation at last?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Miss Kilfinane, languidly. Her power of perceiving a joke was very limited.

"Thanks. Now I know all about Mr. Price; except—except why everybody wants to invite him."

"That I really cannot tell you."

"Then you don't share the general enthusiasm about him?"

"I don't know that there is any general enthusiasm. Only, of course—don't you know how it is?—people have got into the way of putting up with him, and letting him do as he likes."

"He's a very fortunate young man, I should say."

"Young man!" Miss Kilfinane laughed a

hard little laugh. "Why Jack Price is ever so old!"

"Ever so old, is he?" echoed Algernon, genuinely surprised.

"He must be turned forty," said the fair Castalia, rising in obedience to a look from Lady Seely. And if she had been but fifteen herself, she could not have said it with a more infantine air.

After the ladies had withdrawn, Algernon had to sit for about twenty minutes in the shade, as it were, silent, and listening with modesty and discretion to the conversation of his seniors. Had they talked politics, Algernon would have been able to throw in a word or two; but Lord Seely and his guest talked, not of principles or party, but of persons. The persons talked of were such as Lord Seely conceived to be useful or hostile to his party, and he discussed their conduct, and criticised the tactics of ministers in regard to them, with much warmth. But, unfortunately, Algernon neither knew, nor could pretend to know, anything about these individuals, so he sipped his wine, and looked at the family portraits which hung round the room, in silence.

My lord made a kind of apology to him, as they were going upstairs to the drawing-room.

"I'm afraid you were bored, Mr. Errington.

I am sorry, for your sake, that Mr. Price did not honour us with his company. You would have found him much more amusing than us old fogies."

Algernon knew, when Lord Seely talked of Mr. Price not having honoured them with his company, that my lord was indignant against that gentleman. "I have no doubt Mr. Price is a very agreeable person," said he, "but I did not regret him, my lord. I thought it a great privilege to be allowed to listen to you."

Later in the evening Algy overheard Lord Seely say to General Dormer, "He's a remarkably intelligent young fellow, I assure you."

"He has a capital manner," returned the general. "There is something very taking about him, indeed."

"Oh yes, manner; yes; a very good manner —but there's more judgment, more solidity about him than appears on the surface."

Meanwhile, Algernon went on flourishingly, and ingratiated himself with every one. He steered his way, with admirable tact, past various perils, such as must inevitably threaten one who aims at universal popularity. Lady Harriet was delighted with his singing, and Lady Harriet's expressed approbation pleased Lady Seely; for the Dormers were considered to be great musical connoisseurs,

and their judgment had considerable weight among their own set. Their own set further supposed that the verdict of the Dormers was important to professional artists: a delusion which the givers of second-rate concerts, who depended on Lady Harriet to get rid of many seven-and-sixpenny tickets during the season, were at no pains to disturb. Then, Algernon took the precaution to keep away from Lord Seely, and to devote himself to my lady, during the remainder of the evening. This behaviour had so good an effect, that she called him "Ancram," and bade him go and talk to Castalia, who was sitting alone on a distant ottoman, with a distinctly sour expression of countenance.

"How did you get on with Castalia at dinner?" asked my lady.

"Miss Kilfinane was very kind to me, ma'am."

"Was she? Well, she don't make herself agreeable to everybody, so consider yourself honoured. Castalia's a very clever girl. She can draw, make wax flowers, and play the piano beautifully."

"Can she really? Will she play to-night?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Go and ask her."

"May I?"

"Yes; be off."

Miss Kilfinane did not move or raise her eyes when Algernon went and stood before her.

"I have come with a petition," he said, after a little pause.

"Have you?"

"Yes; will you play to-night?"

"No."

"Oh, that's very cruel! I wish you would!"

"I don't like playing before the Dormers. They set up for being such connoisseurs, and I hate that kind of thing."

"I am sure you can have no reason to fear their criticism."

"I don't want to have my performance picked to pieces in that knowing sort of way. I play for my own amusement, and I don't want to be criticised, and applauded, and patronised."

"But how can people help applauding when you play? Lady Seely says you play exquisitely."

"Did she tell you to ask me to play?"

"Not exactly. But she said I might ask you."

At this moment General Dormer came up, and said, with his most benevolent smile, "Won't you give us a little music, Miss Kilfinane? Some Beethoven, now! I see a volume of his sonatas on the piano."

"I hate Beethoven," returned Miss Kilfinane.

"Hate Beethoven! No, no, you don't. It's

quite impossible! A pianist like you! Oh no, Miss Kilfinane, it is out of the question."

"Yes, I do. I hate all classical music, and the sort of stuff that people talk about it."

The general smiled again, shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and walked away.

"Miss Kilfinane, you are ferociously cruel!" said Algernon under his breath as General Dormer turned his back on them. The little fear he had had of Castalia's chilly manner and ungracious tongue had quite vanished. Algernon was not apt to be in awe of anyone; and he certainly was not in awe of Castalia Kilfinane. "Why did you tell the general that you hated Beethoven?" he went on saucily. "I'm quite sure you don't hate Beethoven!"

"I hate all the kind of professional jargon which the Dormers affect about music. Music is all very well, but it isn't our business, any more than tailoring or millinery is our business. To hear the Dormers talk, you would think it the most important matter in the world to decide whether this fiddler is better than that fiddler, or what is the right time to play a fugue of Bach's in."

"I'm such an ignoramus that I'm afraid I don't even know with any precision what a fugue of Bach's is!" said Algernon, ingenuously. He

thought he had learned to understand Miss Castalia. Nevertheless, when, later in the evening, Lady Harriet asked him in her pretty silver tones, "And do you, too, hate classical music, Mr. Errington?" he professed the most unbounded love and reverence for the great masters. "I have had few opportunities of hearing fine music, Lady Harriet," said he; "but it is the thing I have longed for all my life." Whereupon Lady Harriet, much pleased at the prospect of such a disciple, invited him to go to her house every Saturday morning, when he would hear some of the best performers in London execute some of the best music. "I only ask real listeners," said Lady Harriet. "We are just a few music-lovers who take the thing very much *au sérieux*."

On the whole, when Algernon thought over his evening, sitting over the fire in his bedroom at the inn, he acknowledged to himself that he had been successful. "Lady Seely is the toughest customer, though! What a fish-wife she looks beside that elegant Lady Harriet! But she can put on airs of a great lady too, when she likes. It's a very fine line that divides dignity from impudence. Take her wig off, wash her face, and clothe her in a short cotton gown with a white apron, and how many people would know that Belinda, Lady Seely, had ever been anything but a cook, or the landlady

of a public-house? Well, I think I am cleverer than any of 'em. And, after all, that's a great point." With which comfortable reflection Algernon Ancram Errington went to bed, and to sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the day following the dinner at Lord Seely's, Algernon received a card, importing that Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs would be at home that evening.

Of the lady he knew nothing, except that she was an elder sister of young Pawkins, of Pudcombe Hall; and that her family, who were people of consideration in Whitford and its neighbourhood, thought Jemima to have made a good match in marrying Mr. Machyn-Stubbs. In giving him the letter of introduction, Orlando Pawkins had let fall a word or two as to the position his sister held in London society.

"I can't send anybody and everybody to the Machyn-Stubbses," said young Pawkins. "In their position, it wouldn't be fair to inflict our bucolic magnates on them. But I'm sure Jemima will be very glad to make your acquaintance, old fellow."

Algernon was quite free from arrogance. He

would have been well enough contented to dine with Mr. Machyn-Stubbs, had that gentleman been a grocer or a cheesemonger. And, in that case, he would probably have derived a good deal of amusement from any little vulgarities which might have marked the manners of his host, and would have entertained his genteeler friends by a humorous imitation of the same. But he was not in the least overawed by the prospect of meeting Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, and was quite aware that he probably owed his introduction to her, to young Pawkins's knowledge of the fact that he was Lady Seely's relation.

Algernon betook himself to the house of Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, in the fashionable neighbourhood before mentioned, about half-past ten o'clock, and found the small reception-rooms already fuller than was agreeable. Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs received him very graciously. She was a pretty woman, with a smooth fair face and light hair, and she was dressed with as much good taste as was compatible with the extreme of the prevailing fashion. She smiled a good deal, and was quite destitute of any sense of humour.

"So glad to see you, Mr. Errington," said she, when Algernon had made his bow. "You and Orlando are great friends, are you not? You must let me make you acquainted with my husband."

Then she handed Algernon over to a stout, red-faced, white-haired gentleman, much older than herself, who shook hands with him, said, "How d'ye do?" and "How long have you been in town?" and then appeared to consider that he had done all that could be expected of him in the way of conversation.

"I suppose you don't know many people here, Mr. Errington?" said Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, seeing that Algernon was standing silent in the shadow of her husband.

"Not any. You know I have never been in London before."

"Haven't you, really? But perhaps we may have some mutual acquaintances notwithstanding. Let me see who is here!" said the lady, looking round her rooms.

"Are you acquainted with the Dormers, Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs?"

"The Dormers? Let me see——"

"General and Lady Harriet Dormer."

"Oh! no; I don't think I am. Of course I must have met them. In the course of the season, sooner or later, one meets everybody."

"Do you know Miss Kilfinane?"

"Miss Kilfinane? I—I can't recall at this moment——"

"She is a sort of connection of mine; not a

relation, for she is Lord Seely's niece, not my lady's."

"Oh, to be sure! You are a cousin of Lady Seely. Yes, yes; I had forgotten. But Orlando did mention it."

In truth, the fact of Algernon's relationship to Lady Seely was the only one concerning him which had dwelt in Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs's memory. Presently she resumed:

"I should like to introduce you to a great friend of ours—the most delightful creature! I hope he will come to-night, but he is very difficult to catch. He is a son of Lord Mullingar."

"What, Jack Price?"

"Oh, you know him, do you?"

"Only by reputation. He was to have dined at Lord Seely's last night, when I was there. But he didn't show."

"Oh, I know he's dreadfully uncertain. But I must say, however, that he is generally very good about coming to me. It's quite wonderful. I'm sure I don't know why I am so favoured!"

Then Algernon was presented to a rather awful dowager, with two stiff daughters, to whom he talked as well as he could; and the nicest looking of whom he took into the tea-room, where there was a great crush, and where people trod on each other's toes, and poked their elbows into each

other's ribs, to procure a cup of hay-coloured tea and a biscuit that had seen better days.

"Upon my word," thought Algernon, "if this is London society, I think Whitford society better fun." But then he reflected that Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs was not a real leader of fashionable society. She was not quite a rose herself, although she lived near enough to the roses for their scent to cling, more or less faintly, about her garments. He was not bored, for his quick powers of perception, and lively appreciation of the ludicrous, enabled him to gather considerable amusement from the scene. Especially did he feel amused and in his element when, on an allusion to his cousinship to Lady Seely, thrown out in the airiest, most haphazard way, the awful dowager and the stiff daughters unbent, and became as gracious as temperament in the one case, and painfully tight stays in the other, permitted.

"He's a very agreeable person, your young friend, Mr. Ancram Errington," said the dowager, later on in the evening, to Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs.

"Oh yes; he's very nice indeed. He is a great favourite with my people. He half lives at our place, I believe, when Orlando is at home."

"Indeed! He is—a—a—connected with the Seelys, I believe, in some way?"

"Second cousin. Lady Seely was an Ancram—

Warwickshire Ancrams, you know," returned Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, who knew her "Peerage" nearly by heart. Whereupon the dowager went back to her daughter, by whose side, having nothing else to do, Algernon was still sitting, and told him that she should be happy to see him at her house in Portland Place any Friday afternoon, between four and six o'clock during the season.

Presently, when the company was giving forth a greater amount and louder degree of talk than had hitherto been the case—for Herr Doppeldaun had just sat down to the grand piano—Algernon's quick eyes perceived a movement near the door of the principal drawing-room, and saw Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs advance with extended hand, and more eagerness than she had thrown into her reception of most of the company, to greet a gentleman who entered with a kind of plunge, tripping over a bear-skin rug that lay before the door, and dropping his hat.

He was a short, broad-chested man, with a bald forehead and a fringe of curly chestnut hair round his head. He was evidently extremely near-sighted, and wore a glass in one eye, the effort of keeping which in its place occasioned an odd contortion of his facial muscles. He was rubicund, and looked like a man who might grow to be very stout later in life. At present he was only rather stout, and was

braced, and strapped, and tightened, so as to make the best of his figure. His dress was the dress of a dandy of that day, and he wore a fragrant hot-house flower in his button-hole.

"That must be Jack Price!" thought Algernon, he scarcely knew why; and the next moment he got away from the dowager and her daughters, and sauntered towards the door.

"Oh, here is Mr. Errington," said Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, looking round at him as he made his way through the crowd. "Do let me introduce you to Mr. Price. This is Mr. Ancram Errington, a great friend of my brother Orlando. You have met Orlando, I think?"

"Oh, indeed, I have!" said Mr. Jack Price, in a rich sweet voice, and with a very decidedly marked brogue. "Orlando is one of my dearest friends. Delightful fellow, what? Orlando's friend must be my friend, if he will, what?"

The little interrogation at the end of the sentence meant nothing, but was a mere trick. The use of it, with a soft rising inflection of Mr. Jack Price's very musical voice, had once upon a time been pronounced to be "captivating" by an enthusiastic Irish lady. But he had not fallen into the habit of using it from any idea that it was captivating, nor had he desisted from it since all projects of captivation had departed from his mind.

"I was to have met you at dinner, last night, Mr. Price," said Algernon, shaking his proffered hand.

"Last night? I was—where is it I was last night? Oh, at the Blazonvilles! Yes, of course, what? Why didn't you come, then, Mr. Errington? The Duke would have been delighted—perfectly charmed to see you!"

"Well, that may be doubtful, seeing that I cannot flatter myself that his Grace is even aware of my existence," said Algernon, looking at Mr. Price with twinkling eyes, and his mouth twitching with the effort to avoid a broad grin.

Jack Price looked back at him, puzzled and smiling. "Eh? How was it then, what? Was it—it wasn't me, was it?"

Algernon laughed outright.

"Ah now, Mr.—Mr.—my dear fellow, where was it that you were to have met me?"

"My cousin, Lady Seely, was hoping for the pleasure of your company, Mr. Price. She was under the impression that you had promised to dine with her."

Jack Price fell back a step and gave himself a sounding slap on the forehead. "Good gracious goodness!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that?"

"I do, indeed."

"Ah, now, upon my honour, I am the most unfortunate fellow under the sun! I don't know how the deuce it is that these kind of misfortunes are always happening to me. What will I say to Lady Seely? She'll never speak to me any more, I suppose, what?"

"You should keep a little book and note down your engagements, Mr. Price," said Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs, as she walked away to some other guest.

Mr. Price gave Algernon a comical look, half-rueful, half-amused. "I don't quite see myself with the little book, entering all my engagements," said he. "I daresay you've heard already from Lady Seely of my sins and shortcomings?"

"At all events, I have heard this: that whatever may be your sins and shortcomings, they are always forgiven."

"I am afraid I bear an awfully bad character, my dear Mr.——"

"Errington; Ancram Errington."

"To be sure! Ah, I know your name well enough. But names are among the things that slip my memory. It is a serious misfortune, what?"

Then the two began to chat together. And when the crowd began to diminish, and the rattle of carriages grew more frequent down in the street beneath the drawing-room windows, Jack

Price proposed to Algernon to go and sup with him at his club. They walked away together, arm-in-arm, and, as they left Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs's doorstep, Mr. Price assured his new acquaintance that that lady was the nicest creature in the world, and one of his dearest friends; and that he could take upon himself to assert that Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs would be only too delighted to receive him (Algernon) at any time and as often as he liked. "It will give her real pleasure, now, what?" said Jack Price, with quite a glow of hospitality on behalf of Mrs. Machyn-Stubbs. Then they went to Mr. Price's club. It was neither a political club, nor a fashionable club, nor a grand club; but a club that was widely miscellaneous, and decidedly jolly. Algernon, before he returned to his lodging that night, had come to the opinion that London was, after all, a great deal better fun than Whitford. And Jack Price, when he called upon Lady Seely the next day, to make his peace with her, declared that young Errington was, really now, the most delightful and dearest boy in the world, and that he was quite certain that the young fellow was most warmly attached to Lord and Lady Seely.

All this was agreeable enough, and Algernon would have been content to go on in the same way to the end of the London season had it been

possible. But careless as he was about money, he was not careless about the luxuries which money supplies. Certainly, if tradesmen and landlords could only be induced to give unlimited credit, Algernon would have had none the less pleasure in availing himself of their wares, because he had not paid for them in coin of the realm. But as to doing without, or even limiting himself to an inferior quality and restricted quantity, that was a matter about which he was not at all indifferent. He was received on a familiar footing in the Seelys' house; and his reception there opened to him many other houses, in which it was more or less agreeable and flattering to be received. Among the Machyn-Stubbses of London society he was looked upon as quite a desirable guest, and received a good deal of petting, which he took with the best grace in the world. And all this was, as has been said, pleasant enough. But, as weeks went on, Algernon's money began to run short; and he soon beheld the dismal prospect ahead—and not very far ahead—of his last sovereign. And he was in debt.

As to being in debt, that had nothing in it appalling to our young man's imagination. What frightened him was the conviction that he should not be permitted to go on being in debt. Other people owed money, and seemed to enjoy life none

the less. Mr. Jack Price, for instance, had an allowance from his father, on which no one pretended to expect him to live. And he appeared very comfortable and contented in the midst of a rolling sea of debt, which sometimes ebbed a little, and sometimes flowed alarmingly high; but which, during the last ten years or so, he had managed to keep pretty fairly at the same level. But then Mr. Price was the Honourable John Patrick Price, the Earl of Mullingar's son—a younger son, it was true; and neither Lord Mullingar, nor Lord Mullingar's heir, was likely to have the means, or the inclination, to fish him out of the rolling sea aforesaid. At the most, they would throw him a plank now and then just to keep him afloat. Still there was something to be got out of Jack Price by a West-end tradesman who knew his business. Something was to be got in the way of money, and, perhaps, something more in the way of connection. Upon the whole, it may be supposed that the West-end tradesmen understood what they were about, when they went on supplying the Honourable John Patrick Price with all sorts of comforts and luxuries, season after season.

But with Algernon the case was widely different, and he knew it. He had ventured to speak to Lord Seely about his prospects, and to ask that nobleman's "advice." But Lord Seely

had not seemed able to offer any advice which it was practicable to follow. Indeed, how should he have done so, seeing that he was ignorant of most of the material facts of the case? He knew in a general way that young Ancram (Algernon had come to be called so in the Seely household) was poor; but between Lord Seely's conception of the sort of poverty which might pinch a well-born young gentleman, who always appeared in the neatest-fitting shoes and freshest of gloves, and the reality of Algernon's finances, there was a wide discrepancy. Algernon had indeed talked freely, and with much appearance of frankness, about his life in Whitford; but it may be doubted whether Lord Seely, or his wife either—although she, doubtless, came nearer to the truth in her imaginings on the subject—at all realised such facts as that Mrs. Errington had no maid to attend on her; that her lodgings cost her eighteen shillings a week; and that the smell of cheese from the shop below was occasionally a source of discomfort in her only sitting-room.

With Lord Seely Algernon had made himself a great favourite, and the proof of it was, that my lord actually thought about him when he was absent; and one day said to his wife, "I wish, Belinda, that we could do something for Ancram."

"Do something for him! I think we do a

great deal for him. He has the run of the house, and I introduce him right and left. And he is always asked to sing when we have people."

"That latter looks rather like his doing something for us, I think."

"Not at all. It's a great advantage for a young fellow in his position to be brought forward, and allowed to show off his little gifts in that way."

"He is wasting his time. I wish we could get him something to do."

"I am sure you have plenty of claims on you that come before him."

"I—I did speak to the Duke of Blazonville about him the other day," said my lord, with the slightest hesitation in the world.

The Duke of Blazonville was in the cabinet, and had been a colleague of Lord Seely's years ago.

"What on earth made you do that, Valentine? You know very well that the next thing the duke has to give I particularly want for Reginald."

"Oh, but what I should ask for young Ancram would be something at which your nephew Reginald would probably——"

"Turn up his nose?"

"Something which Reginald would not care about taking."

"Reginald wouldn't go abroad, except to Italy. Nor, indeed, anywhere in Italy but to Naples."

"Exactly. Whether the duke would consider that he was particularly serving the interests of diplomacy by sending Reginald to Naples, I don't know. But, at all events, Ancram could not interfere with that project."

"Serving——? Nonsense! The duke would do it to oblige me. As to Ancram, I have latterly had a kind of plan in my head about Ancram."

"About a place for him?"

"Well, yes; a place, if you like to call it so. What do you say to his coming abroad with us in the autumn?"

"Eh! Coming abroad with us?"

"Of course we should have to pay all his expenses. But I think he would be amusing, and perhaps useful. He talks French very well, and is lively and good-tempered."

"I have no doubt he would be a most charming travelling companion——"

"I don't know about that. But I should take him out of kindness, and to do him a service."

"But I don't see of what use such a plan would be to him, Belinda."

"Well, I've an idea in my head, I tell you. I have kept my eyes open, and I fancy I see a chance for Ancram."

"You are very mysterious, my dear!" said Lord Seely, with a little shrug.

"Well, least said, soonest mended. I shall be mysterious a little longer. And, meanwhile, I think we might make him the offer to take him to Switzerland with us, since you have no objection."

"I have no objection, certainly."

"I think I shall mention it to him, then. And, if I were you, I wouldn't bother the duke about him just yet."

"But what is this notion of yours, Belinda?"

The exclamation rose to my lady's lips, "How inquisitive men are!" but she suppressed it. It was the kind of speech which particularly angered Lord Seely, who much disliked being lumped in with his fellow-creatures on the ground of common qualities. Even a compliment, so framed that my lord was supposed to share it with a number of other persons, would have displeased him. So my lady said, "Well, now, Valentine, you'll begin to laugh at me, very likely, but I believe I'm right. I think Castalia is very well inclined to like this young fellow. And she might do worse."

"Castalia! Like him? Why, you don't mean——?"

"Yes, I do," returned my lady, nodding her head. "That's just what I do mean. I'm sure,

the other evening, she became quite sentimental about him."

"Good heavens, Belinda! But the idea is preposterous."

"Yes; I knew you'd say so at first. That's why I didn't want to say anything about it just yet awhile."

"But allow me to say that, if you had any such idea in your head, it was only proper that it should be mentioned to me."

"Well, I have mentioned it."

Lord Seely clasped his hands behind his back, and walked up and down the room in a stiff, abrupt kind of march. At length he stopped opposite to her ladyship, who was assiduously soothing Fido; Fido having, for some occult reason, become violently exasperated by his master's walking about the room.

"Why, in the first place——do send that brute away," said his lordship, sharply.

"There! he's quiet now. Good Fido! Good boy! Mustn't bark and growl at master. Yes; you were saying——?"

"I was saying that, in the first place, Castalia must be ten years older than this boy."

"About that, I should say. But if they don't mind that, I don't see what it matters to us."

"And he has not any means, nor any prospect of earning any, that I can see."

"Why, for that matter, Castalia hasn't a shilling in the world, you know. We have to find her in everything, and so has your sister Julia, when Castalia goes to stay with her. And if these two could set their horses together—could, in a word, make a match of it—why, you might do something to provide for the two together, don't you see? Killing two birds with one stone!"

"Very much like killing two birds, indeed! What are they to live on?"

"If Ancram makes up to Castalia, you must get him a place. Something modest, of course. I don't see that they can either of them expect a grand thing."

"Putting all other considerations aside," said my lord, drawing himself up, "it would be a very odd sort of match for Castalia Kilfinane."

"Come! his birth is as good as hers, any way. If his father was an apothecary, her mother was a poor curate's daughter."

"Rector's daughter, Belinda. Dr. Vyse was a learned man, and the rector of his parish."

"Oh, well, it all comes to the same thing. And as to an odd sort of match, why, perhaps, an odd match is better than none at all. You know Castalia's no beauty. She don't grow younger;

and she'll be unbearable in her temper, if once she thinks she's booked for an old maid."

Poor Lord Seely was much disquieted. He had a kindly feeling for his orphan niece, which would have ripened into affection if Miss Castalia's character had been a little less repellent. And he really liked Algernon Errington so much that the notion of his marrying Castalia appeared to him in the light of a sacrifice, even although he held his own opinion as to the comparative goodness of the Ancram and Kilfinane blood. But, nevertheless, such was Lady Seely's force of character, that many days had not elapsed before his lordship was silenced, if not convinced, on the subject. And the invitation to go to Switzerland was given to Algernon, and accepted.

CHAPTER XIX.

As the spring advanced, letters from Algernon Errington arrived rather frequently at Whitford. His mother had ample scope for the exercise of her peculiar talent, in boasting about the reception Algy had met with from her great relations in town, the fine society he frequented, and the prospect of still greater distinctions in store for him. One or two troublesome persons, to be sure, would ask for details, and inquire whether Lord Seely meant to get Algy a place, and what tangible benefits he had it in contemplation to bestow on him. But to all such prosy, plodding individuals, Mrs. Errington presented a perspective of vague magnificence, which sometimes awed and generally silenced them.

The big square letters on Bath post paper, directed in Algernon's clear, graceful handwriting, and bearing my Lord Seely's frank, in the form of a blotchy sprawling autograph in one corner, were,

however, palpable facts; and Mrs. Errington made the most of them. It was seldom that she had not one of them in her pocket. She would pull them out, sometimes as though in mere absence of mind, sometimes avowedly of set purpose, but in either case she failed not to make them the occasion for an almost endless variety of prospective and retrospective boasting.

It must be owned that Algernon's letters were delightful. They were written with such a freshness of observation, such a sense of enjoyment, such a keen appreciation of fun—tempered always by a wonderful knack of keeping his own figure in a favourable light—that passages from them were read aloud, and quoted at Whitford tea-parties with a most enlivening effect.

"Those letters are written *pro bono publico*," Minnie Bodkin observed confidentially to her mother. "No human being would address such communications to Mrs. Errington for her sole perusal."

"Well, I don't know, Minnie! Surely it is natural enough that he should write long letters to his mother, even without expecting her to read them aloud to people."

"Very natural; but not just such letters as he does write, I think."

Minnie suppressed any further expression of

her own shrewdness. Her confidence in herself had been rudely shaken; and she made keen, motive-probing speeches much seldomer than formerly. And she could not but agree in the general verdict, that Algernon's letters were very amusing. Miss Chubb was delighted with them; although they were the occasion of one or two tough struggles for supremacy in the knowledge of fashionable life between herself and Mrs. Errington. But Miss Chubb was really good-natured, and Mrs. Errington was unshakeably self-satisfied; so that no serious breach resulted from these combats.

"Dormer—Lady Harriet Dormer!" Miss Chubb would say, musingly. "I think I must have met her when I was staying with Mrs. Figgins and the Bishop of Plumbunn. And the Dormers' place is not so very far from Whitford, you know. I believe I have heard papa speak of his acquaintance with some of the family."

"Oh no," Mrs. Errington would reply; "not likely you should have ever met Lady Harriet at Mrs. Figgins's. She is the Earl of Grandcourt's daughter; and Lord Grandcourt had the reputation of being the proudest nobleman in England."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Errington," the spinster would retort, bridling and tossing her head side-

ways, "that could be no reason why his daughter should not have visited the bishop! A dignitary of the Church, you know! And as to family—I can assure you the Figginses were most aristocratically connected."

"Besides, Miss Chubb, Lady Harriet must have been in the nursery in those days. She's only six-and-thirty. You can see her age in the 'Peerage.'"

This was a kind of blow that usually silenced poor Miss Chubb, who was sensitive on the score of her age. But, on the whole, she was not displeased at the opportunity of airing her reminiscences of London; and she did not always get the worst of it in her encounters with Mrs. Errington.

Mrs. Errington had one listener who, at all events, was never tired of hearing Algy's letters read and re-read, and whose interest in all they contained was vivid and inexhaustible. Rhoda bestowed an amount of eager attention on the brilliant epistles bearing Lord Seely's frank, which even Mrs. Errington considered adequate to their merits.

Often—not quite always—there would be a little message. "How are all the good Maxfields? Say I asked." Or sometimes, "Give my love to Rhoda." Mrs. Errington took Algernon's sending

his love to Rhoda much as she would have taken his bidding her stroke the kitten for him. She did not guess how it set the poor girl's heart beating. It was only natural that Rhoda's face should flush with pleasure at being so kindly and condescendingly remembered. Still less could the worthy lady understand the effect of her careless words on Mr. Maxfield. Once she said in his presence, "Have you any message for Mr. Algernon, Rhoda?" (She had recently taken to speaking of her son as "Mr." Algernon; a circumstance which had not escaped Rhoda's sensitive observation.) "You know he always sends you his love."

"Oh, my young gentleman has not forgotten Rhoda, then?" said old Maxfield, without raising his eyes from the ledger he was examining.

"Algernon never forgets. Indeed, none of the Ancrams ever forget. An almost royal memory has always been a characteristic of our race." With which magnificent speech Mrs. Errington made an impressive exit from the back shop.

Old Max knew enough to be aware that the tenacity even of a royal memory had not always been found equal to retaining such trifles as a debt of twenty pounds. But so long as Algy remembered his Rhoda, he was welcome to let the money slip. Indeed, if Algy behaved properly to Rhoda, there should be no question of repayment. Twenty

pounds, or two hundred, would be well bestowed in securing Rhoda's happiness, and making a lady of her. Nevertheless, old Max kept the acknowledgment of the debt safely locked up, and looked at it now and then, with some inward satisfaction. Algernon was coming back to revisit Whitford in the summer, and then something definite should be settled.

Meanwhile, Maxfield took some pains to have Rhoda treated with more consideration than had hitherto been bestowed on her. He astonished Betty Grimshaw by sharply reproving her for sending Rhoda into the shop on some errand. "Rice!" he exclaimed testily, in answer to his sister-in-law's explanation. "If you want rice, you must fetch it for yourself. The shop is no place for Rhoda, and I will not have her come there." Then he began to display a quite unprecedented liberality in providing Rhoda's clothes. The girl, whose ideas about her own dress were of the humblest, and who had thought a dove-coloured merino gown as good a garment as she was ever likely to possess, was told to buy herself a silk gown. 'A good 'un. Nothing flimsy and poor," said old Max. "A good, solid silk gown, that will wear and last. And—you had better ask Mrs. Errington to go with you to buy it. She will understand what is fitting better than your aunt

Betty. I wish you to have proper and becoming raiment, Rhoda. You are not a child now. And you go amongst gentlefolks at Dr. Bodkin's house. And I would not have you seem out of place there, by reason of unsuitable attire."

Rhoda was delighted to be allowed to gratify her natural taste for colour and adornment; and she shortly afterwards appeared in so elegant a dress, that Betty Grimshaw was moved to say to her brother-in-law, "Why, Jonathan, I'll declare if our Rhoda don't look as genteel as 'ere a one o' the young ladies I see! Why you're making quite a lady of her, Jonathan!"

"Me make a lady of her?" growled old Max. "It isn't me, nor you, nor yet a smart gown, as can do that. But the Lord has done it. The Lord has given Rhoda the natur' of a lady, if ever I see a lady in my life; and I mean her to be treated like one. Rhoda's none o' your sort of clay, Betty Grimshaw. She's fine porcelain, is Rhoda. I suppose you've nothing to say against the child's silk gown?"

"Nay, not I, Jonathan! She's welcome to wear silk or satin either, if you like to pay for it. And, indeed, I'm uncommon pleased to see a bit of bright colour, and be let to put a flower in my bonnet. I'm sure we've had enough of them Methodist ways. Dismal and dull enough they

were, Jonathan. But you can't say as I ever grumbled, or went agin' you. Anything for peace and quietness' sake is my way. But I do like church best, having been bred to it. And I always did, in my heart, even when you and David Powell would be preaching up the Wesleyans. I never said anything, as you know, Jonathan. But I kept my own way of thinking all the same. And I'm only glad you've come round to it yourself, at last."

This was bitter to Jonathan Maxfield. But he had had once or twice to endure similar speeches from his sister-in-law, since his defection from Methodism. His autocratic power in his own family was wielded as strictly as ever, but his assumption of infallibility had been fatally damaged. To get his own way was still within his power, but it would be vain henceforward to expect those around him to acknowledge—even with their lips—that his way must of necessity be the best way.

At the beginning of April there came to Whitford the announcement that Algernon had received and accepted an invitation to accompany the Seelys abroad in the late summer; and that, therefore, his visit to "dear old Whitford" was indefinitely postponed. This announcement would have angered and disquieted old Max beyond measure, had it not been that Algernon took the precaution to write him a letter, which arrived in Whitford by the

same post as that which brought to Mrs. Errington the news of his projected journey to the Continent. It was a very neat letter. Some persons might have called it a cunning letter. At any rate, it soothed old Max's anxious suspicions, if it did not absolutely destroy them. "I believe, my good friend," wrote Algernon, "that you will quite approve the step I am taking, in accompanying Lord and Lady Seely to Switzerland. They have no son, and I think I may say that they have come to look upon me almost as a child of the house. I remember all the good advice you gave me before I left Whitford. And when I was hesitating about accepting my lord's invitation, I thought of what you would have said, and made up my mind to resist the strong temptation of coming back to dear old Whitford this summer." Then in a postscript he added: "As to that little private transaction between us, I must ask you kindly to have patience with me yet awhile. I try to be careful, but living here is expensive, and I am put to it to pay my way. You will not mention the matter to my mother, I know. And, perhaps, it would be well to say nothing to her about this letter. May I send my love to Rhoda?"

In justification of this last sentence, it must be said that Algernon was quite innocent of Lady Seely's project regarding himself and Castalia; and

that there were times when he thought with some warmth of feeling of the summer days in Llanryddan, and told himself that there was not one of the girls whom he met in society who surpassed Rhoda Maxfield in the delicate freshness of her beauty, or equalled her in natural grace and sweetness.

Algernon had really excellent taste.

END OF VOL. I.

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